

## CHAPTER 14

# **The Archaeology of Children on Michigan State University's Campus**

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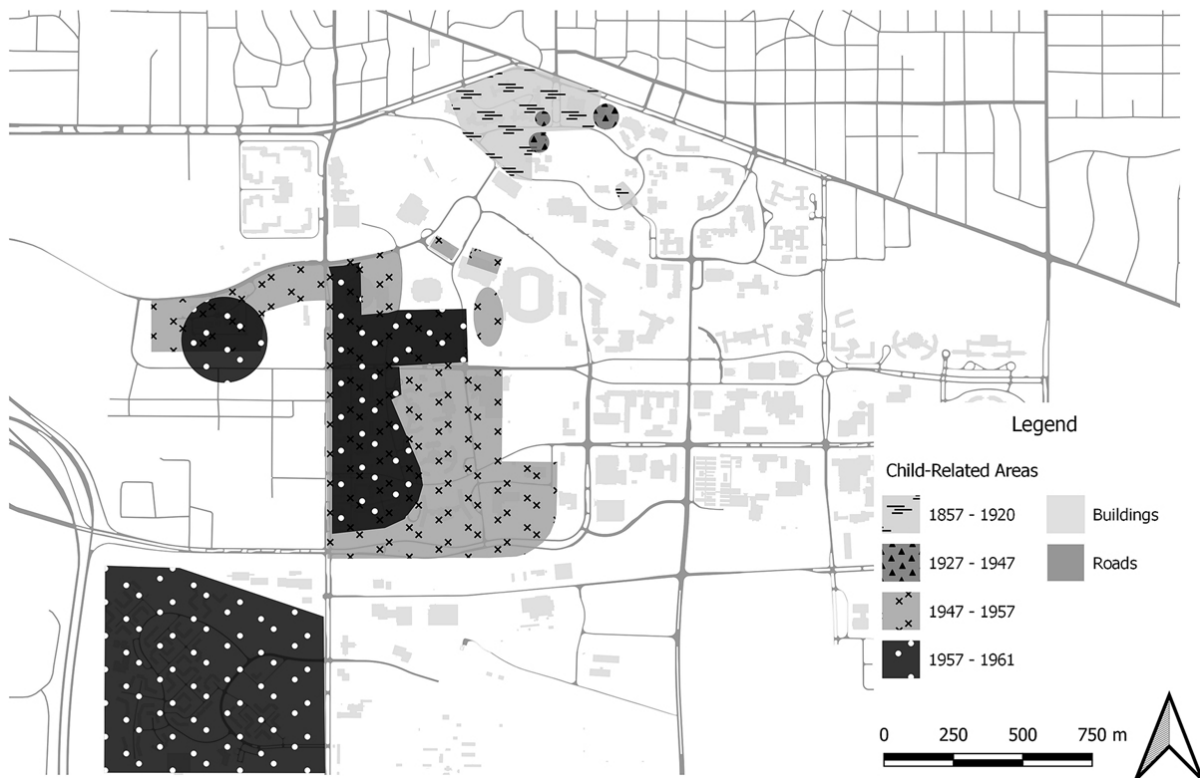


When thinking of a college or university campus, a number of images come to mind: parties, dining halls, dormitories, drinking, late nights, libraries, lecture halls, sports, roommates, books, protests. What typically does not come to mind is an image of children exploring laboratories and living in dormitories with their parents and college students. In this chapter, we explore the hidden history of children on Michigan State University's (MSU) campus using archaeological and archival evidence. These datasets, which have been analyzed by the MSU Campus Archaeology Program responsible for overseeing the archaeological heritage of the campus, reveal the changing role children played on campus from the university's meager beginnings as a swampy, backwater agricultural school to its dramatic transformation into one of the largest and most well known land-grant institutions in the United States.

Childhood is generally considered to be a time when youth are taught cultural norms and guidelines (Baxter 2005; Kamp 2001; Lillehammer 1989). We focus on how this enculturation process varied across time and space on campus due to both the changing demographic of the campus and shifting ideas about the role

children should play on university campuses. To investigate these attitudes toward children at MSU, we focus on three areas of campus that have either significant archaeological and/or archival evidence of children's presence ([map 14.1](#)). The first area of campus is known as Saints' Rest, which was the first dormitory on campus and dates from 1857 to 1876. The second site is Faculty Row, which dates from 1857 to the 1910s and was the first housing constructed for faculty. Lastly, we will look at the expansion of campus due to the G. I. Bill, which involved housing numerous families on campus from 1945 to 1959. We examine places where children would have lived on campus during the years the university was in operation. We do not explore the lives of Indigenous children who lived on MSU land, which "occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples" (American Indian and Indigenous Studies 2022).

### Child-Related Areas of MSU's Historic Campus from 1857 - 1961



**Map 14.1.** Map showing changes in the places of childhood on MSU's campus over time based on the locations of homes and other buildings children would have spent considerable time. © Jeff Burnett.

## Saints' Rest, 1857–76

While perceptions of college housing are often focused on students' accommodations, some early staff at MSU, then Michigan Agricultural College, lived on campus with their families. From 1857 to the late 1910s, several college faculty and staff residences dotted the campus landscape, including Faculty Row, Saints' Rest, and Williams Hall dormitories, a herdsman's house, and a farm manager's house (Beal 1915: 66). Our investigation of staff families focuses on the first dormitory on campus, Saints' Rest. Saints' Rest was traditionally thought of as an all-male dormitory built in 1857 and destroyed by a fire in 1876 (Skowronek and Lewis 2010). Although the dormitory was constructed to feed and house male college

students, historical records and secondary sources show that, until 1870, college staff and their families resided in the building alongside students (Beal 1915: 267; Michigan State UAHC 1863: 108–10, 1866: 2:28:140; Lewis 2010: 9–14). The recovery of child-related artifacts during excavations of a pre-1870 privy associated with the dormitory provides additional evidence that college students and families shared the space (Bright 2016). Saints' Rest, therefore, serves as a reminder that archaeologists must be wary of gendering sites in ways that obscure other aspects of their history. While Saints' Rest was undoubtedly a male-dominated space, it was also a place where families lived, and children likely grew up.

Saints' Rest was divided into student rooms, a kitchen, a parlor, a laundry room, a dining room, as well as apartments for the steward's family and for kitchen staff (Beal 1915: 267; Widder 2005: 31–32, 285–87). Unlike the students, staff remained in the dormitory year-round (Kuhn 1955: 78–79), further complicating a solely student-focused perception of the building. One of the early stewards of Saints' Rest, Fitz. A. Stebbins, began his tenure in April 1863, resided with his family in the dormitory. Records show that they were afforded "entire control over the Boarding Hall," with exception of rooms assigned to the farm manager and interim steward and his family, who also resided in Saints' Rest (UAHC 1.2: 1863: 1:27: 104–10). Many other stewards, staff, and their families likely took up residence at Saints' Rest until 1870, when the staff quarters, the kitchens, and dining hall were moved to the newly constructed Williams Hall dormitory (Lewis 2010: 14). Professional stewards would remain a part of college life until 1883, when they were replaced by student workers (Kuhn 1955: 134). The presence of these employees and their families as the only full-time residents of Saints' Rest and the only residents likely to have children, asks us to reconceptualize the populations of dormitories on campus prior to 1883.

Saints' Rest was first excavated in 2005 during a field school held by the MSU Department of Anthropology (Skowronek and Lewis 2010). Despite successfully locating the building's foundation,

recovered material culture was mainly limited to institutional ceramics and structural debris and hardware. Unfortunately for the archaeologists, by 1876, the boarding and social functions of the building had shifted to Williams Hall (Lewis 2010: 9–14). Additionally, the fire in 1876 occurred during the winter break, meaning few personal effects would have been in the building at the time. As a result, the excavation provided few insights into the daily lives of the individuals who resided in the dormitory (Brock 2010: 4). This would change in 2015 when a 1.8 meter x 1.8 meter (six-foot by six-foot) brick-lined privy, or outhouse, was discovered near the location of Saints' Rest by MSU campus archaeologists during routine construction monitoring (Bright 2016).

Because they served a secondary function as convenient places to dispose of trash, privies often contain high densities of material culture, typically deposited in discrete layers. As these facilities were regularly cleaned out and typically closed and buried at the end of their useful life, the well-preserved cultural material within often represents a narrow temporal window. As such, privies often provide important insights into the health, patterns of consumption, and the personal, cultural, and social lives of people residing in a particular area (Wheeler 2000a, 2000b). The date of the privy assemblage, 1850s–1860s, as well as its location, approximately 10 meters (30 feet) southwest of Saints' Rest, strongly suggests it may have been associated with the building (Bright 2016: 18). Since the privy assemblage pre-dates 1870, it is likely that artifacts were deposited and the context closed prior to the construction of Williams Hall and thus, prior to the removal of dining and social spaces, including staff apartments.

Artifacts recovered from the privy include ironstone vessels, glass lamp shades and drinking cups, floral and faunal remains, and building hardware. Most notable, however, was the large quantity of personal items, including smoking pipes, buttons, shoes, buckles, a straight razor, vulcanized rubber combs, and two ceramic dolls. The two dolls, a 10 centimeter (4 inch) tall, intact "Frozen Charlotte" figurine and a shattered, but fully-reconstructable porcelain doll

head, were unexpected finds at the all-male dormitory (Bright 2016: 10–17). Small, undecorated, and unclothed Frozen Charlotte figurines ([figure 14.1a](#)) were a common toy during the second half of the nineteenth century and were linked to a cautionary Victorian poem (Feister 1991: 31). In the poem, a young girl named Charlotte ignores her mother's warning to cover up on a cold winter's night and freezes solid. These inexpensive figurines were widely accessible to American consumers who often baked them into cakes as a small surprise for children (Bright 2016: 13–15).

The porcelain doll head is highly decorated with a finely painted face indicating it was a part of what may have been a more cherished possession compared to the figurine ([figure 14.1b](#)). Despite the lack of a maker's mark, the doll was dated to the early-1860s to 1870s, based on the "flat-top" hairstyle which became popular during the US Civil War (Bright 2016: 15). By the late-1860s, following the post-Civil War boom and the mass production of porcelain dolls, dolls of this kind, while not cheap, were becoming more accessible for the growing American middle-classes (Formanek-Brunell 1993: 10–16). The three holes in the shoulder plate show that the head would have been articulated to a cloth body with attached porcelain hands and feet. Unlike earlier porcelain dolls, which tended to be entirely ceramic, a porcelain doll with a cloth body would have been more appealing to children, who often preferred rag dolls over showpieces (Formanek-Brunell 1993: 14).



**Figure 14.1.** Porcelain toys uncovered during excavations of the privy associated with Saints' Rest in 2016: (a) Frozen Charlotte figurine, (b) Head and chest plate of a finely painted doll. Photographs taken by Autumn Painter, courtesy of the MSU Campus Archaeology Program.

Both artifacts indicate the presence of children in and around Saints' Rest. The multiple connections between the Frozen Charlotte figurine and young girls during the mid-nineteenth century, the fact it was unbroken, and the disposable nature of the toy all indicate that it likely belonged to a child living near to or in Saints' Rest. A porcelain doll, on the other hand, could have belonged to an adult just as easily as a child. However, the doll head recovered from the privy had a cloth body, suggesting it was purchased as a child's toy, rather than as a decorative object. During the second half of the nineteenth century, children were often socialized and educated in dominant Victorian gender and social ideologies through play (Formanek-Brunell 1993: 19; Quirk 2008: 16; Wilkie 2000: 101–2). The presence of these toys in a privy associated with the first

dormitory on campus strongly suggests that children of staff resided, played, and learned about their social world(s) in the central areas of college life.

## **Faculty Row, 1857–1910s**

As mentioned in the previous section, college faculty and staff lived on campus with their families in the early days of the university. The main area of campus for this type of housing was located on the northern edge of campus and became called Faculty Row. Homes were built and occupied beginning in 1857 through the 1910s. After the majority of the faculty moved out of the homes in the early 1900s, many of the houses were repurposed for teaching. In total, ten homes and one apartment building were constructed. The first four buildings were constructed in 1857 and only one building is still standing on campus today, the university president's house.

As both faculty members and their families resided in these homes, Faculty Row became, as MSU historian Madison Kuhn describes it, "a place of children" (Kuhn 1955: 402). Most families who lived on Faculty Row had at least one child, and faculty recognized that it was an "ideal place in which to rear a family" (Kuhn 1955: 88). Notable faculty who had children while residing in Faculty Row include the Abbot, Kedzie, Cook, Carpenter, Beal, and Fairchild families. From archival evidence, we are able to glimpse the day-to-day lifestyle of faculty and their families. Dorothy Pettit Reed, daughter of Rufus H. Pettit, remembered that "As a little girl I loved everything about campus. The faculty were like aunts and uncles, and all the other campus brats, as they called us, were like sisters and brothers. Now I realize it was special. The whole campus was our playground" (Kestenbaum 1976: 118). David Fairchild (cited in Kuhn 1955: 88), another child who grew up on Faculty Row, wrote that "The setting of our childhood was quite ideal. The campus of the college was really only a clearing in the great Michigan forest and it contained all of the elements necessary to develop happy,

healthy boys and girls. There was a brook teeming with water life; sugar maples to tap when the sap ran fresh in the spring; and great black walnut trees.” Kuhn (1955: 88) also notes that faculty and staff often joined the children in play, and invited them into laboratories and other campus spaces. In later decades, many of the first female students to join the university came from Faculty Row, themselves the grown-up daughters of faculty and staff (Kuhn 1955: 123).



**Figure 14.2.** Group photo of children that lived on Faculty Row, 1892. UAHC, MSU Photograph Collections (MSUPC), A008282. Courtesy of Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, reproduced with permission.

It is tempting to draw connections between youthful experiences of walking the grounds of the State Agricultural College, with its active farms, gardens, and laboratories, and the fact that many of the college’s first female students were children of faculty and staff. However, the narrative may not be so straightforward, and the question represents a promising avenue for future research. When

the first female students were admitted in 1870 there was no separate women's course or dormitory as there would be in later decades (Kuhn 1955: 122–23). Women students dined with, took classes with, and lived in the same building as their male counterparts, but in 1872 admissions outpaced student housing and the college prioritized male applicants, rejecting all women who could not live with friends or family near campus (Kuhn 1955: 123). As such, women students who had family living on campus had a better chance of gaining admittance than those who did not. A deep dive into archival records, memoirs, and sociocultural context of Victorian-era education and childhood experiences is required to sort out this interesting, but complex issue and thus is beyond the scope of this chapter.

While the Campus Archaeology Program has not conducted targeted excavations on Faculty Row, that region of campus has been extensively surveyed during campus construction projects. From these surveys, it has been confirmed that this region of campus is highly disturbed due to the construction of college dormitories after the demolition of faculty homes. Very few artifacts have been uncovered across that region of campus, including window glass, brown bottle glass, wire and square cut nails, and undecorated whiteware, with the majority of material recovered being construction debris. At this time, no artifacts recovered from Faculty Row showcase the day-to-day lives of faculty and their families residing on campus during the first few decades of the university. However, archival documents provide an important glimpse into what Victorian-era life was like for children living on campus.

## **Veterans' Housing, 1945–59**

Like many universities throughout the United States, the MSU campus grew exponentially as World War II ended. The university anticipated an unprecedented growth in its student body due to the

G. I. Bill of Rights that guaranteed veterans the right to a college education, with the bill covering “fees, books, and \$65.00 per month subsistence for single persons” and “\$90 for married ones” (Kuhn 1955: 443). MSU’s enrollment doubled between 1946 and 1949, going from 8,000 veterans in 1946 to 16,000 in 1949. In 1949, MSU’s rapidly rising enrollment numbers catapulted the university from twenty-second place to ninth place in terms of nation-wide university enrollment numbers (Kuhn 1955: 444). The university capitalized on the opportunity to educate veterans by being one of few universities to construct additional housing for them, including housing for married veterans. The university president at the time, President John A. Hannah, foresaw the need and helped encourage the university’s board to secure US\$6 million to support housing construction (Kuhn 1955: 445).

More students meant more classes needed to be taught and more people needed to teach them. In 1946, approximately 250 faculty were hired to address the educational demands of the growing campus (Brookover 1990: 7). The growth of the student body resulted in classes taught six days a week instead of five, and class times were extended to run from seven in the morning to ten at night on weekdays (Brookover 1990: 2). Utility expenses increased as campus expanded, requiring that courses initiate enrollment caps, resulting in the construction of new buildings, such as “a classroom building, a science building, physics building and power plant and facilities” (Brookover 1990: 2). Despite initially welcoming women on campus in its earlier days, women students who could not locate off-campus housing were refused admission due to the lack of adequate housing on campus for women (Brookover 1990: 3).

The town of East Lansing was not equipped to handle the influx of students or faculty needing housing (Kuhn 1955: 445), so the university, still known as Michigan State College (MSC), built temporary housing for them. There were three types of housing for faculty: 184 brick apartments (some of which also were assigned to married students), 31 steel Quonset Huts, and 19 British Empire Flat Top houses (Brookover 1990: 3–4, 7). The brick apartments, known

as the “Bricks” and “named for alumni who died in the war,” were not covered by the G. I. Bill like the Quonset Huts (Kuhn 1955: 447). The steel Quonset Huts were sourced from a variety of “emergency war-housing projects in various Michigan towns” (Kuhn 1955: 446). Student needs were more extensive, resulting in the construction of 104 Quonset Huts for 1,456 single men featuring “a bathhouse with 40 showers and a cafeteria and kitchen to feed 2000 persons”; “steel barracks to house 240 single men”; and “1100 family units erected by the Federal Public Housing Authority” (Brookover 1990: 3). Spaces not designed to house students were repurposed, with 600 single men living in double-deck bunk beds on a floor of an athletics building (Jenison Fieldhouse) and 200 single men occupying a floor of the student union (Brookover 1990: 3–4).

The dramatic increase in married students and faculty resulted in an unprecedented number of children residing on campus. In 1947, there were over 1,560 student families living in temporary campus housing, which included 285 children under the age of five and 15 children six years or older (Anson 1947: 2). Off-campus families had even more young children, which numbered 500 children under the age of five in 1947 (Anson 1947: 2). The rise in children on campus corresponded to national trends. Birthrates in the United States skyrocketed between 1946 and 1964, which is partially attributed to women delaying childbirth due to the Depression and the war (Mintz 2004: 276). In response to the immediate need for childcare and preschools to care for students’ young children on campus, the Michigan State College Nursery was constructed (Anson 1947). The nursery cared for children ages two to five. Its secondary purpose was to serve as a child development laboratory where professors and students could study the “physical, mental, emotional, and social growth of children,” which fulfilled the college’s mission as a land-grant research institution (Anson 1947: 1).

In the summer of 2020 amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lives of these post–World War II campus families were unearthed during a construction project on what is currently known as Service Road. Construction work involved installing and

extending utility lines. A large, nearly football field sized midden or trash deposit was encountered during the project that is in association with the post–World War II housing on campus. Since only three Campus Archaeology Program staff members were given permission to work on the project because of the pandemic, controlled excavation of the site was not undertaken. Instead, it became a salvage project centered on recovering complete, dateable, and identifiable artifacts that could tell the story of the faculty and students who lived on campus after World War II ([Figure 14.3a–f](#)). Thousands of artifacts from this time period were recovered, including artifacts representing changing ideas about child-rearing in America. Though laboratory research is ongoing, artifacts identified thus far date predominantly from the 1940s to the 1960s.

As national birth rates surged and the post–World War II economy stabilized, a consumer sphere directed at entertaining children took root (Mintz 2004: 277). A celluloid squeaker doll, which appears to be a White male child in bright blue overalls, was likely manufactured between 1940 and 1947 by the Irwin Corporation of New Hampshire ([Figure 14.3c](#)). The company was in operation from 1922 to 1973. It featured a small squeaker at the base of the back of its head, as toys with squeakers were popular in the 1940s. Celluloid toys stopped being produced in 1947 because of their flammable nature. A plastic toy automobile featuring what looks to be a convertible top was found thanks to a construction worker on the project spotting it just as it was about to be crushed by a backhoe (15.4f). Plastic toy automobiles were first produced in 1938 (Hanlon 1993: 30). The manufacturer of this particular toy car appears to be the Renewal Manufacturing Company, which made and sold plastic toy cars from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s (Hanlon 1993: 32). The style of the plastic car appears to date to this time period. National anxieties during the post–World War II Cold War focused on improving STEM education, which is also expressed in toys from the era. A plastic toy microscope ([figure 14.3d](#)) signifies concerns over the United States falling behind in

global scientific and technological advances, and the resultant push for school curricula to expand mathematics and scientific knowledge (Mintz 2004: 287, 289).



**Figure 14.3.** Child-related artifacts uncovered at the 2020 Service Road: (a) Creamware creamer, (b) Pyrex baby bottle, (c) Celluloid squeaker doll, (d) Yellow plastic toy microscope, (e) Parade plate sherd, (f) Yellow plastic toy car. Photographs taken by Autumn Painter, courtesy of the MSU Campus Archaeology Program.

In addition to toys, photographs and archival data from the community provide insight into children's improvised play. A photograph dating to 1956 shows young children, including what looks to be a toddler, outside of the married student housing playing in a large, muddy pool of water (UAHC, MSUPC, A002163 [figure 14.4]). A letter written by Ray D. Lamphear, a university employee and manager of married and veterans housing, notes that children living in "the M.S.C. trailers" are "not cognizant of the danger of playing in or near the roadway" (UAHC 7.2: 2513: 13). Lamphear

notes that people driving over the speed limit are endangering the lives of the over 90 children, nearly all under the age of four, in the trailer housing (UAHC 7.2: 2513: 13). To solve the issue, he writes that “enclosed play yards, with sand boxes, have been constructed in each section throughout the entire area” (UAHC 7.2: 2513: 13). Additionally, he remarks that the play yards have been placed in locations with no shade, though the road in which the children were previously playing also is in direct sunlight (UAHC 7.2: 2513: 13).

Postwar parenting introduced new attitudes about child-rearing, including exploratory play such as the play described above, and an emphasis on following the child’s lead when it comes to nurturing and caring for them. Pediatrician Dr. Spock, spearheaded a “more gentle, nurturing approach” to parenting (Mintz 2004: 279, 89). Perhaps reflecting this change from raising children with a “firm-hand” to rearing children with their development and psychological needs in mind, decorative ceramics specifically manufactured for use by children were found during the construction project. A ceramic sherd from a plate manufactured by Arabia, a Finnish ceramic company still in operation today, for children was recovered ([figure 14.3e](#)). The pattern, which is known as “Zoo” or “Parade,” features a variety of animals, including an elephant, and was in production from 1951 to 1968. A small, child-sized creamware creamer featuring bunny rabbits was also found ([figure 14.3a](#)). This creamer was part of the Roseville Pottery Company’s “Juvenile” line of ceramics for children, hence the line’s name. Other “Juvenile” ceramics, which were manufactured from 1910 to the early 1920s, featured ducks, pigs, cats, dogs, and cows. Though not specifically manufactured for children, one-half of a set of interlocking, hugging ceramic bear salt and pepper shakers was recovered. One could easily envision parents using these whimsical bears to encourage their children to sit down and eat a meal at the kitchen table. The patent for this set was obtained by its artist, Ruth Van Tellingen, in 1951. Based on its maker’s mark, which changed over time, it appears as though this set dates to between 1951 and 1958. Finally, a Pyrex Evenflo Borosilicate glass bottle dating to as early as 1927

found at the site reflects cultural changes in how infants were to be fed ([figure 14.3b](#)). The bottle featured a six-sided design to prevent the bottle from rolling. While some doctors encouraged breastfeeding, new parenting manuals and guides suggested parents institute scheduled, regimented infant feeding patterns (Thulier 2009: 89). Following this advice, parents, en masse, turned to bottle-feeding. Consequently, “no generation in American history was less likely to be breast-fed” (Mintz 2004: 281).



**Figure 14.4.** Three children float on inner tubes (or tires) in a large puddle outside of married student housing. Three more children are in the background. UAHC, MSUPC A002163. Courtesy of Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, reproduced with permission.

## The Changing Role of Children on Campus

The artifacts recovered on what is today MSU's campus reflect circumstances internal to campus as well as external shifts in the perception of children and child-rearing in American culture. On campus, children's roles have been historically dependent on student enrollment. In its early days as a small, agricultural college when horses were the primary form of transportation across campus, children, students, and faculty intermingled, sharing both living and work spaces in what is now known as the "Sacred Space," the center of the historic campus. When the campus expanded exponentially in response to the need to educate veterans coming home from World War II, students and faculty were moved south of the Sacred Space and therefore away from the main campus. New buildings to house laboratories and classrooms were erected, forcing student and faculty housing away from the Sacred Space.

As the campus continues to grow in modern times, faculty and student families have been relegated to off-campus housing. Today, MSU views family housing as the responsibility of students and faculty rather than the university. This is a notable shift from the earliest days of the college, where children and students lived side-by-side in Saints' Rest dormitory. While research on children continues to be conducted and childcare is offered on the outskirts of campus, children are no longer frolicking across campus or attending college classes alongside professors and adult students as they once did not so long ago. Today's children play a more transitory role in campus life, visiting campus for short-term summer programming rather than living on campus year-round.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, children arrived in droves on campus as soon as college students moved out at the end of spring semester. During the summers, children participated in gifted and talented programming and summer camps for horseback riding, baseball, basketball, football, ice hockey, swimming, music, art, robotics, entomology, and mathematics, to name just a few. In the summers, grandparents and their grandchildren also arrive for "Grandparents University" where the two groups spend several days on campus bonding and taking "university" classes, including a

course on archaeology directed by the authors. Though children no longer leave a substantial material record on campus, there are still ephemeral reminders of their presence. This was made apparent with the discovery of a small plastic dinosaur toy during monitoring of the 2020 construction project. The artifact is a McDonald's Happy Meal toy associated with the 1994 release of the film *The Flintstones*. What the preceding discussion illustrates is that children's roles on campus have never been static nor are they archaeologically invisible, even when they play a much smaller role in contemporary campus life.

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**Dr. Stacey L. Camp** is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the MSU Campus Archaeology Program at Michigan State University. She is a historical archaeologist who examines migrant and diasporic communities living in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century western United States. Her publications explore how different facets of people's identities—race, class, gender, and citizenship—shape their perceptions of consumerism and material culture. She has conducted ethnography and archaeological research in the midwestern and western United States, China, and Ireland. Since 2009, she has been excavating and studying the remains of Idaho's Kooskia Internment Camp, a World War II Japanese American incarceration camp.

**Dr. Autumn M. Painter** is an archaeologist with a regional focus of the eastern woodlands of North America and broad interests in zooarchaeology, foodways, social interaction, and coalescent communities. She served as the MSU Campus Archaeologist for two

years. She is also interested in and actively engages with community driven archaeology and public engagement.

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