

THE NORTH DAKOTA PRESERVATIONIST

News from the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office

Summer 2021



Director's Update: A Good Time for Historic Preservation

By Bill Peterson, Ph.D.

The 2021 North Dakota legislative session was my first experience leading a state agency through the appropriations process. I am certainly glad that I had the assistance of my knowledgeable colleagues to guide me. I learned so much and had such a great time. My sincerest thanks goes out to my team—Assistant Director Andrea Wike, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Fern Swenson, State Archivist Shane Molander, and Audience Engagement & Museum Director Kim Jondahl—for being patient with me and teaching me all about the agency. Their wisdom has been immeasurably helpful. I am also thankful for the guidance of the State Historical Society of North Dakota Foundation executive director, Marlo Sveen, and the State Historical Society board of directors, as well as our lawmakers for their work during the session.

Our agency's overall funding needs were addressed in HB 1018. One issue the agency faces on an ongoing basis is the repair, maintenance, and backlog of those projects at our sites outside of Bismarck. We have 80 historic structures, and some of those have considerable preservation needs. There is never enough funding to get all the work done. In the last biennium, the agency received \$1 million in funding to address issues of extraordinary repair and maintenance. For the 2021-2023 biennium, we received \$4.2 million in one-time funding for the extraordinary maintenance and repair of buildings. This is very big news and allows us to address a wide range of very necessary projects across North Dakota.

This is not to say that we only have \$4.2 million in needs. Historic preservation repair or restoration work often requires the use of contractors and tradespeople with highly specialized skills. According to Fern Swenson and our team of construction planners, this figure represents the scope of projects we think we can get done in the biennium. During the next two years, we will be compiling a long-term list of projects and overall agency needs.



State Historical Society of North Dakota Director Bill Peterson, shown here visiting the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn, also serves as the state historic preservation officer. Photo by SHSND

I think we have some exciting projects on the list. Our friends in Jamestown who have worked tirelessly with us over the years on the restoration of the 1883 Stutsman County Courthouse will be excited to know that the elevator project is on the current list. Our properties in Medora at the Chateau de Morès are slated for needed work as are several of the buildings in Fort Totten. The Pembina State Museum is slated for some necessary mechanical upgrades, and work will continue on the historic properties of Camp Hancock and the Former Governors' Mansion in Bismarck. We look forward to keeping you informed of the progress on these projects taking place throughout the state.

Finally, we're pleased to share the news that as of July 1, 2021, the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center and Fort Mandan in Washburn have been transferred from the North Dakota State Parks and Recreation Department to the State Historical Society of North Dakota. It really is a great time for historic preservation in North Dakota.



Archaeologist using guyed extension ladder along the Missouri River in South Dakota, 1954. Photo courtesy of South Dakota Archaeological Research Center and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Top: Fort Clark during the Heritage Outbound field trip, 2016.
Bottom: Erosion at Double Ditch Indian Village State Historic Site, 2013.
Photos by SHSND

Ladders to Drones: Advancements in Aerial Archaeology

By Andrew J. Clark, Ph.D., Chief Archaeologist

From the pioneering flights of O.G.S. Crawford in the 1920s to jury-rigged extension ladders guyed for stability, archaeologists have long sought to elevate the camera's lens to obtain overhead views of the landscape. More recently, the ubiquity of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has made these endeavors cost-effective, safer, and more reliable. Over the past decade, drones have revolutionized archaeology by providing stable, low-flying aerial platforms, coupled with advances in camera and scientific sensor technology.

In the early to mid-2010s, archaeologists at the State Historical Society of North Dakota quickly realized that UAVs could support its core mission "to identify, preserve, interpret, and promote the heritage of North Dakota and its people." Early efforts included erosion tracking at Double Ditch

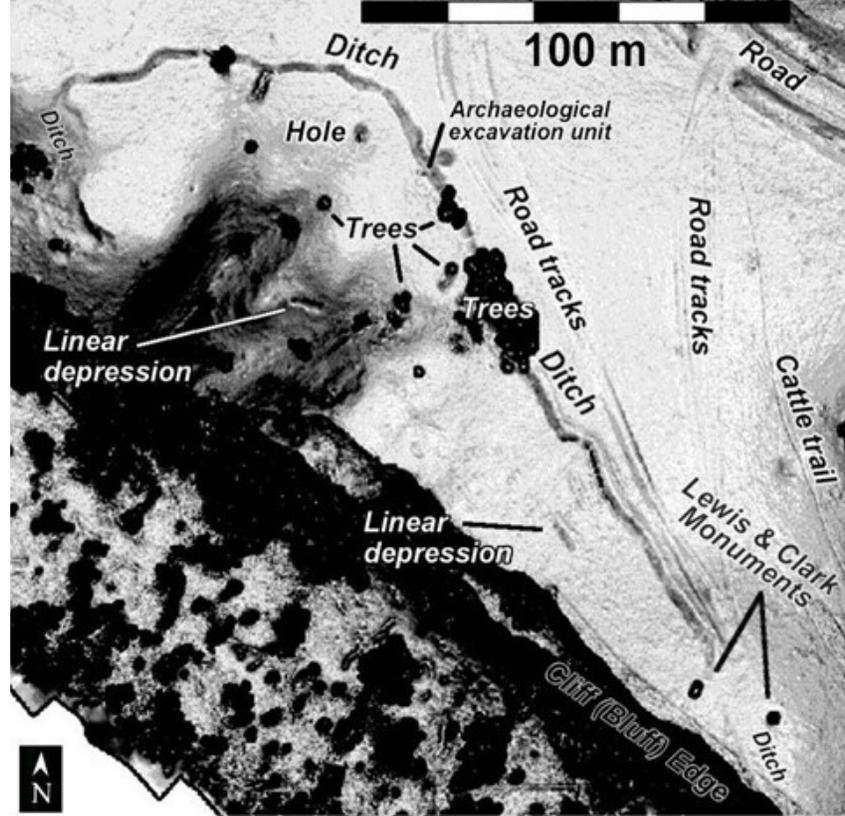
Indian Village State Historic Site and public outreach at Fort Clark State Historic Site.

Advances in UAV technology continue to increase at breakneck speeds. The State Historical Society keeps pace by expanding its drone fleet, acquiring cinematic-quality cameras and multi-spectral sensors, incorporating survey-grade GPS capabilities, utilizing photogrammetric desktop software to produce high-resolution aerial mosaics and 3D models, and renewing certification with the Federal Aviation Administration. State Historical Society archaeologists have flown UAVs over 19 archaeological sites on land managed by state, tribal, and federal agencies and on private property, including Fort Mandan Overlook State Historic Site, Harmon Village, and the *Abner O'Neal* steamboat wreck.

The State Historical Society collaborated with Ken Kvamme, Ph.D., of the University of Arkansas, to combine UAV flights with geophysical surveys at Fort Mandan Overlook and Harmon Village. The results of both these aerial and ground-based surveys enhance interpretations by combining multiple remote sensing methods.

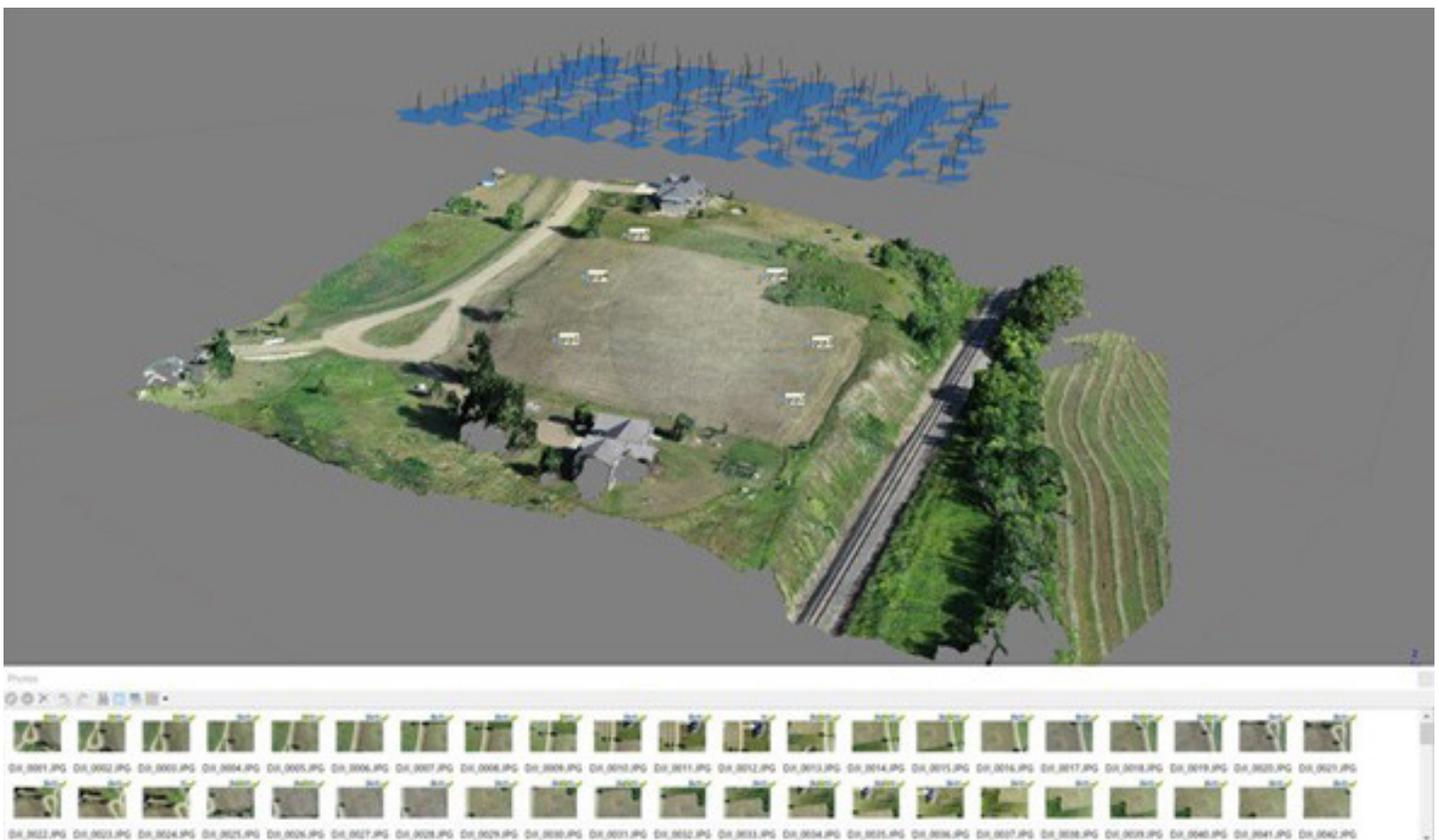
Fort Mandan Overlook is an earthlodge village with two known archaeological occupations. The earlier one dates to the 14th century, and the later occupation dates to the 18th and 19th centuries. Protected to the southwest by a natural bluff, villagers built a fortification system, likely during the second occupation, which provided extra protection from invaders coming from the east.

Like Fort Mandan Overlook, Harmon Village, inhabited during the 16th and 17th centuries, is nestled against a bluff and palisaded on its periphery. Unlike Fort Mandan Overlook, the fortification system features bastions, creating an extra level of defense. Additionally, earthlodge depressions are visible on the surface, revealing a compact village layout. At both sites, the



Fort Mandan Overlook relief map produced using UAV-collected photographs. Courtesy of Ken Kvamme

combination of aerial photography, site modeling, and geophysical surveys identified natural, cultural, and modern impacts that are difficult to discern with the naked eye.



Producing a 3D model of Harmon Village in desktop software. Image by Agisoft Metashape

Constructed in 1884 for the Ohio River steamboat trade, the *Abner O'Neal* spent its last days navigating the Missouri River in the Dakotas. During its final voyage, on July 17, 1892, the *Abner O'Neal* was carrying 9,000 bushels of wheat when it hit a snag near Painted Woods Creek. All attempts to salvage the remains were unsuccessful; the boat and cargo were a total loss. During the Garrison Dam's autumn drawdown in 2020, the Missouri River revealed the steamboat wreckage, offering State Historical Society archaeologists an

opportunity to document its current condition. The near-infrared and color photographs show a complex interplay between the boat wreckage and the Missouri River. Today, the steamboat is part of the river's ecosystem.

Through partnerships with federal and tribal agencies, the State Historical Society's drone program will further the agency's core goals by collecting media for educational materials and conducting new scientific analyses.

Aerial photograph of the *Abner O'Neal*. Photo by SHSND



Near-infrared image of the *Abner O'Neal*. Photo by SHSND





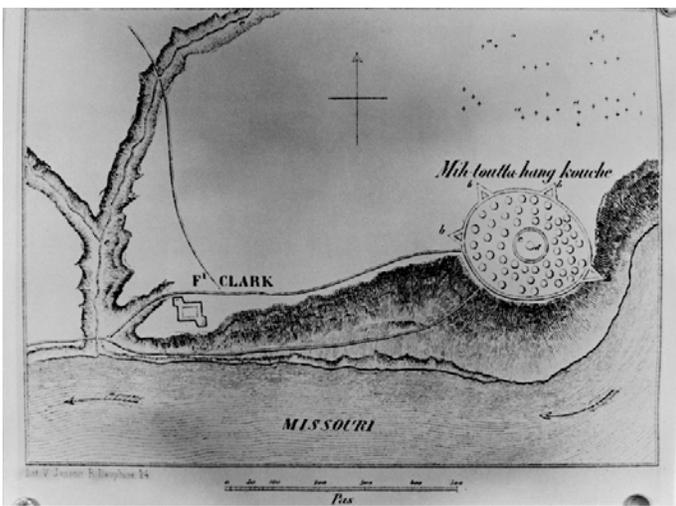
Several earthlodge impressions remain at Fort Clark State Historic Site. Photo by SHSND

Spotlight on a North Dakota State Historic Site: Fort Clark

By Zachary J. Lechner, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Specialist (Historian)

Located eight miles west of Washburn, Fort Clark State Historic Site consists of the remains of two 19th-century fur trading posts (Fort Clark and Fort Primeau) and a contemporaneous Indian village. The Mandans first occupied the village, which they called *Mih-tutta-hang-kusch*, in 1822. The Arikara people later inhabited it in the late 1830s. The site contains no structures dating to the period of occupation—only fieldstone structures put up by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. However, several earthlodge impressions, which are visible both on the surface and by air, as well as numerous artifacts, remain. Many artifacts have been excavated during various archaeological projects since 1968. The site bears considerable historical and archaeological significance. Its status as a state historic site ensures that a vital center of the 19th-century fur trade and Euro-American and Native American interaction on the Upper Missouri River can continue to be studied by historians and archaeologists, as well as enjoyed by the public.

Unique as a sustained meeting place of Euro-American and Native American cultures, Fort Clark is the only extant site on the northern Plains that documents the close relations between a fur trading post and a nearby Indian village. The only comparable site, Like-a-Fishhook Village and Fort Berthold, is now underwater, lost to flooding from Lake Sakakawea as a result of the Garrison Dam construction project (1947-1953).¹ Fort Clark, in operation for 30 years (1830-1860), maintained a vital, long-lasting presence in the region, on the frontier of U.S. expansion. It was further distinguished by its proximity—literally just yards away—from a vibrant Native American village to which both Fort Clark and its later competitor Fort Primeau catered. As a result, the historic site, which includes several interpretive signs, presents the opportunity to explore the cultures of both sedentary, agriculture-based Native populations like the Mandans and Arikaras, as well as the Hidatsas, who were frequent visitors. It also offers



Maximilian's stylized map of Fort Clark and *Mih-tutta-hang-kusche*, 1833-1834. Photo by SHSND

insights about such nomadic Indian groups as the Dakotas and Assiniboines, who frequently traveled to the Fort Clark area to conduct trade with and on occasion attack the village Indians.

Fort Clark is most famous, unfortunately, as a site of incalculable misery and death. Among the locations most ravaged by the 1837 smallpox epidemic, which killed more than 80 percent of the Mandan population, was *Mih-tutta-hang-kusche*. Other tribes including the Hidatsas and Blackfeet fared better but still suffered heavy losses. These “virtually lost cultures,” as historian William H. Goetzmann called them, are detailed in the historical and archaeological record created at Fort Clark to an extent, especially for the Mandans, that is nearly unrivaled on the Upper Missouri.² Archaeologist William J. Hunt Jr. would agree, as he called Fort Clark “a unique archeological, anthropological, and historical resource” that represents like no other existing site “an early American commercial enterprise on the northern plains, one which attracted both Native and EuroAmericans alike for trade and, for the EuroAmericans, [functioned] as a cultural refuge and location where the only research on Mandan culture took place before that tribe’s virtual destruction by smallpox.”³

Fort Clark—and, to a lesser extent, Fort Primeau—formed a key part of the network of Upper Missouri fur trading posts that was set up by various companies, beginning in the 1820s. These posts hold considerable insights about the operations of the fur trade, the lives of traders and tribespeople,

and the nature of interactions between the largely white fur trade personnel and the Native Americans who consumed goods offered by Euro-Americans, frequently in exchange for animal peltry and buffalo robes.

The Mandan/Arikara village and Fort Clark attracted numerous visitors, including American artist George Catlin and German explorer and naturalist Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwid, both of whom wrote extensively about the village and Fort Clark, the lives of their inhabitants, and the fur trade itself. Karl Bodmer, who traveled with Maximilian, and Catlin also created stunning drawings and paintings of the fort and *Mih-tutta-hang-kusche*, along with their inhabitants and surrounding landscapes.

Fort Clark State Historic Site is the rare location associated with the fur trade that contains a rich historical record and largely unadulterated physical and archaeological integrity. This “fairly pristine” place, in the words of the authors of *Fort Clark and Its Indian Neighbors: A Trading Post on the Upper Missouri*, is well-protected by the State Historical Society of North Dakota, which has operated it as a state historic site since 1938.⁴ Fort Clark State Historic Site offers archaeologists, historians, citizens of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, and members of the public a chance to study and disseminate knowledge about an important meeting place between Indian and Euro-American cultures, one that illuminates several larger national—and even international—historical trends.

In 2019, the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), located at the State Historical Society, began the process of nominating Fort Clark, Fort Primeau, the nearby Native American village, and the rest of the land contained within the boundaries of Fort Clark State Historic Site as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). While the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986, NHL designation would convey a more exclusive status. For example, only about a third of the approximately 9,000 National Register-listed properties that have

national significance are also NHLs. Like the National Register, the NHL program is administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Explaining the distinction between National Register and NHL listings, the NPS states on its website:

Landmarks have been recognized by the Secretary of the Interior as possessing national significance. Nationally significant properties help us understand the history of the nation and illustrate the nationwide impact of events or persons associated with the property, its architectural type or style, or information potential. A nationally significant property is of exceptional value in representing or illustrating an important theme in the history of the nation. Properties listed in the National Register are primarily of state and local significance.

Per the required procedures, the North Dakota SHPO sent a letter to the NPS expressing its desire to nominate “Fort Clark Historical and Archaeological District,” mainly comprising Fort Clark, Fort Primeau, and the adjacent Mandan/Arikara village as an NHL. NPS determined that the site was eligible and provided further instructions. Beginning in January 2020, SHPO Historic Preservation Specialist Zachary J. Lechner began researching the history of the site itself, along with the intertwined histories of the 19th-century fur trade and Native American life on the Upper Missouri River. In December, Lechner submitted a 70,000-word NHL draft nomination to NPS reviewers, who provided comments and required revisions several months later.

During later stages of the process, the NPS will likely enlist subject matter experts from across the United States to examine the nomination; they may request further edits. After incorporating



Karl Bodmer, *Mato-Tope, Adorned with the insignia of his warlike deeds*, 1839. Aquatint of Chief Mato-Tope (Four Bears), who died in the 1837 smallpox epidemic at Fort Clark

their feedback, the nomination will be reviewed by a series of federal entities—first the Landmarks Committee, which then has the discretion to recommend the nomination to the National Park System Advisory Board. If the Advisory Board finds the nomination acceptable, it will forward the nomination to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, who ultimately determines whether a site will become a National Historic Landmark.

If designated as an NHL, Fort Clark would join seven other NHLs in North Dakota. It would become the first new NHL in the state since the Biesterfeldt Site, near Lisbon, in 2016. The other landmarks are Lynch Knife River Flint Quarry, Frederick A. and Sophia Bagg Bonanza Farm, Huff Archeological Site, Big Hidatsa Village Site, Menoken Indian Village Site, and Fort Union Trading Post.

ENDNOTES

¹ William J. Hunt Jr., “Summary of Results and Conclusions,” in *Archeological Investigations at Fort Clark State Historic Site North Dakota: 1973-2003 Studies at the Fort Clark and Primeau Trading Posts*, ed. William J. Hunt Jr., prepared for the State Historical Society of North Dakota (Flagstaff, AZ: PaleoCultural Research Group, 2003), 209.

² William H. Goetzmann, “Introduction: The Man Who Stopped to Paint America,” in David C. Hunt, Marsha V. Gallagher, and William J. Orr, *Karl Bodmer’s America* (Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska: Joslyn Art Museum and University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 22.

³ Hunt, “Summary of Results and Conclusions,” 209.

⁴ W. Raymond Wood, William J. Hunt, and Randy H. Williams, *Fort Clark and Its Indian Neighbors: A Trading Post on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 251.

2021 North Dakota Certified Local Government Conference

By Zachary J. Lechner, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Specialist (Historian)

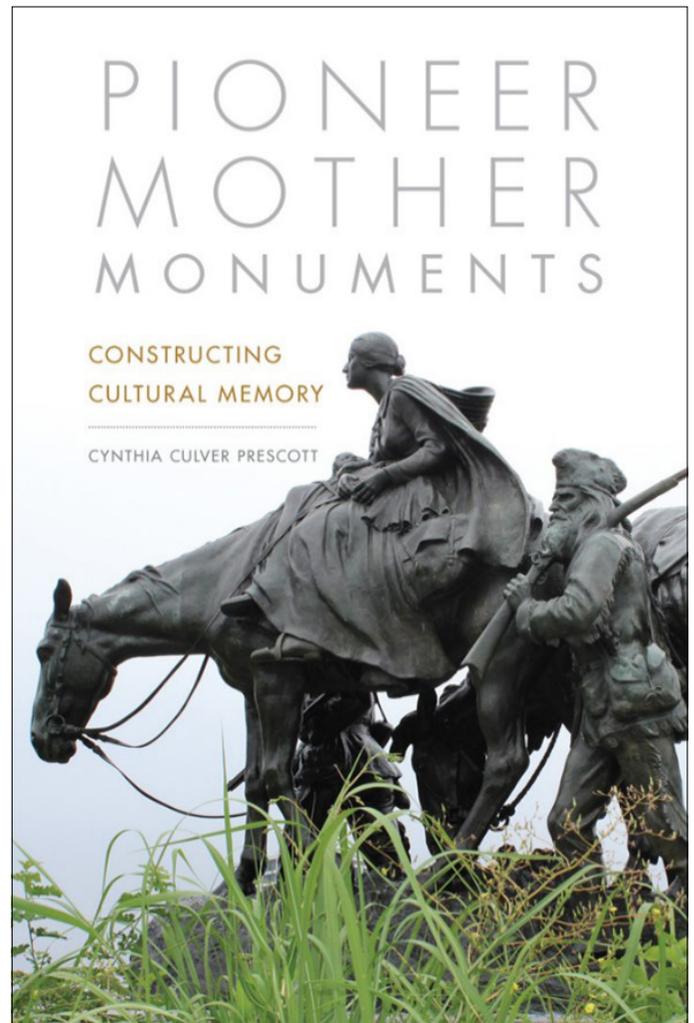
Each year, North Dakota's certified local governments (CLGs) host an annual historic preservation conference. Cities or counties can be designated as certified local governments, which are eligible to apply for competitive CLG-oriented subgrants through the federal Historic Preservation Fund and to receive access to technical assistance from their state historic preservation office and the National Park Service. There are currently eight CLGs in North Dakota: Pembina County, Walsh County, Devils Lake, Grand Forks, Fargo, Buffalo, Bismarck, and Dickinson.

Between Monday, March 29, and Thursday, April 1, the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, one of the state's CLGs, with assistance from the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), hosted the 2021 North Dakota Certified Local Government Conference. The virtual event featured a variety of illuminating presentations related to historic preservation issues in the state and on the northern Plains.

During Monday's session, Bill Peterson, director of the State Historical Society of North Dakota and state historic preservation officer, provided an update on the recent state legislative session, detailing bills related to historic preservation and the operations of the State Historical Society. Peterson's presentation was followed by updates from the state's CLGs, which included information on recent National Register listings in various localities, as well as ongoing projects like the Walsh County CLG's oral history initiative.

Tuesday's session was devoted to mid-20th century architecture in North Dakota. Will Hutchings of the Bismarck Historic Preservation Commission (BHPC) and Emily Sakiarassen of Metcalf Archaeological Consultants discussed the ongoing survey of the Highland Acres neighborhood in Bismarck. The BHPC, with Metcalf's assistance, is currently surveying homes and other features in this post-World War II suburban-style neighborhood in

preparation for nominating Highland Acres to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. Following Hutchings and Sakiarassen's presentations, William Caraher, Ph.D., associate professor of history at the University of North Dakota (UND), weighed in on the process of identifying and surveying midcentury Grand Forks housing. Caraher indicated that recent surveys have focused on single-family homes, but that future surveys will assess midcentury apartment buildings as well.



Author Cynthia Culver Prescott discussed her new book at the conference. University of Oklahoma Press

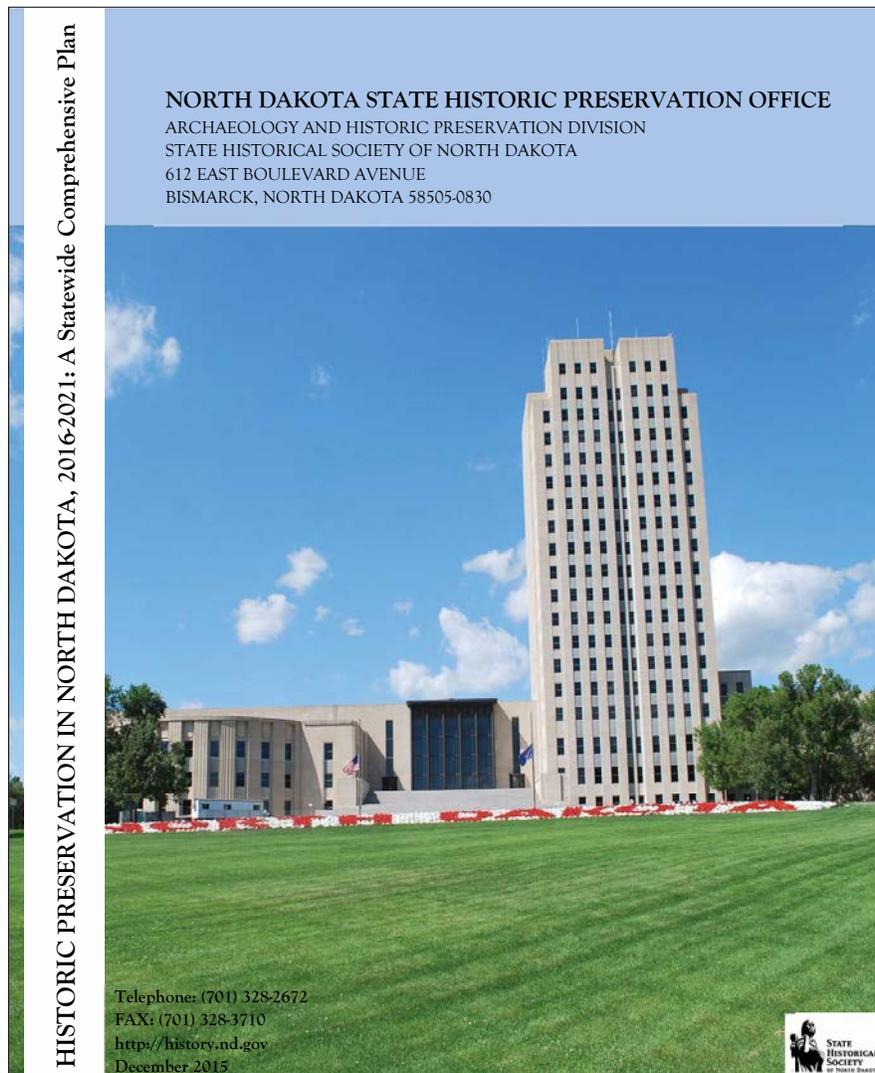
Wednesday's session featured a presentation by Cynthia Culver Prescott, Ph.D., associate professor of history at UND, whose work analyzes

the intersection of gender, race, social class, and historical memory in the American West. Prescott discussed her latest book, *Pioneer Mother Monuments: Constructing Cultural Memory* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2019). She noted that recent racial justice protests and controversy surrounding Confederate monuments have precipitated renewed attention on the messages conveyed in monuments to Euro-American settlement in the western United States. Critics, Prescott explained, charge that such monuments valorize white supremacy and settler colonialism and implicitly support the destruction or removal of Native peoples.

Thursday's schedule featured presentations by North Dakota SHPO Historic Preservation Specialists Lorna Meidinger and Zachary Lechner. Meidinger provided helpful advice on preparing a nomination

to the National Register of Historic Places. Lechner followed Meidinger's presentation with an update on the SHPO's progress toward revising the state historic preservation plan, which will go into effect on January 1, 2022, and the results of a survey about historic preservation that the SHPO conducted last year. Meidinger, Lechner, and their SHPO colleagues then participated in a Q&A session with conference participants that covered such topics as the historic preservation tax credit program and Section 106 review, a process that requires "a project, activity, or program either funded, permitted, licensed, or approved by a Federal Agency" to consider potential impacts on historic properties.

Recordings of the conference's Zoom sessions are available on the [Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission website](http://www.grandforkshistoricpreservation.com).



The SHPO is currently updating the state historic preservation plan.

Archaeological Component of State Historic Preservation Plan

By Amy C. Bleier, Research Archaeologist

Archaeologists of the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) are currently updating the *North Dakota Comprehensive Plan for Historic Preservation: Archaeological Component* in 2021. Staff strive to update the plan approximately every five years to provide current and pertinent data and research questions. The most recent plan, published in 2016, is available [online](#).

The plan is a primary resource for activities in the historic preservation program, which is administered by the SHPO. Principal aspects of the program are illustrated in Figure A.1.

The plan is directly related to the Survey and Inventory Program because the summary information in the plan is drawn from the North Dakota Cultural Resources Survey files and cultural resource reports. Review and compliance activities rely on background information in the plan to assess the adequacy of projects that involve identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural resources. The background information, data gaps, and preservation goals and priorities outlined in the plan are intended to support the development of strategies for treating cultural resources consistently and in ways that enhance understanding and appreciation of the state's cultural heritage.

There are two major parts of a statewide comprehensive plan: (1) the Archaeological Component, which addresses precontact resources, nearly all of which are related to Native American lifeways; and (2) the Historical Component, which deals with historic-era resources, including standing structures. Most of the information in both components is summarized in terms of "contexts" that enhance understanding and appreciation of the state's cultural heritage.

Context statements are the portions of the plan that summarize information concerning pre-contact



Figure A.1: The Historic Preservation Program at the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office. Re-printed from the *North Dakota Comprehensive Plan for Historic Preservation: Archaeological Component*

and historic cultural resources by place, time, and theme. Place, time, and theme are terminologically equivalent to geographical area, chronological period, and research topic. Contexts describe the different types of known pre-contact sites in different parts of the state. They provide the comparative background information needed for the enlightened management of cultural resources. Contexts identify baseline data, data gaps, research questions, and other considerations that impact the process of evaluating the eligibility of cultural resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The fundamental purpose of preparing context documents is to aid federal agencies, the SHPO, and cultural resources specialists in expediting the Section 106 process and to guarantee that the results of that process will contribute to preserving the state's cultural heritage. Comprehensive, statewide context documentation renders the identification of cultural resources more objective. It provides information that can be employed to formulate data recovery and mitigation plans. The state plan identifies directions for other historic preservation and research activities of the State Historical Society and its Archaeology and Historic Preservation Department, as well as those of governmental agencies, independent researchers, and students.

Visit our [state plan webpage](#) at the end of the year to explore the updated plan.



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For more information, please contact Zachary J. Lechner at zlechner@nd.gov or 701.328.3576.



Drone mapping using Pix4Dcapture software at Fort Mandan Overlook State Historic Site. Photo by SHSND