

# Historical Archaeology of Arkansas: A Hidden Diversity

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## Review

**Bartoy, Kevin M.**

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**Drexler, Carl G.** *Historical Archaeology of Arkansas: A Hidden Diversity*.  
University of Tennessee Press, \$49.95 ISBN 9781621901822

### Uncovering Hidden Histories and Historiographies of Arkansas' Past

Although the authors of this volume focus on the diversity of Arkansas' past that has been hidden in traditional histories, "hidden diversity" is also quite an appropriate subtitle for this volume given the relative lack of scholarly publications focused on the historical archaeology of Arkansas. If one just considers Drexler's introduction, "Arkansas Historical Archaeology through Time," this volume makes a tremendous contribution towards revealing the important role that Arkansas has played not only in the development of archaeology and public archaeology, but, especially, historical archaeology. The introductory chapter provides the usual background information as to the contributions which follow, but it also serves as a comprehensive outline for the practice of historical archaeology in Arkansas that is a welcome and much needed addition to the historiography of the discipline.

The contributions to the volume cover a wide range of subject matter, some of which is well worn territory in historical archaeology and some of which pushes the methodological and theoretical limits of the discipline. Buchner's analysis of stoneware manufacturing sites and Valentino's study of the Van Winkle blacksmith shop are classic materialist-focused explorations, which show how archaeology can add a depth and richness to our understanding of less documented production activities in the past. Similarly, Stewart-Abernathy's contribution focused on several antebellum archaeological sites, Proebsting's work on the Lewis Log Home, and Drexler's battlefield archaeology study are also classic examples of how archaeology operates as more than a "handmaiden to history." Archaeology provides insights into the mundane practices of daily life that are the foundations for cultural expressions that influence our way of being in the world.

Pushing the methodological and theoretical boundaries a bit more are contributions by Brennan, McKinnon, and Brandon and Hilliard. These studies not only focus on recently popularized topics, such as gender, identity, and memory, which are crucial to a more robust understanding of the past, but the authors also explore these topics through a landscape perspective, which is one of the most important emerging concepts in archaeology. Given that archaeologists study the past through artifacts, many studies are often myopic in their focus on materials or groupings of materials within a single site. This singularity of focus can disregard the fact that it is people and not things that are the true subjects of our discipline. If we indeed are interested in the people, we must attempt to understand how they moved throughout their world so as to better understand how they interacted with their material world to forge their cultural understanding and manipulation of that world. These contributions provide interesting case studies that will be useful for scholars and students interested in landscape archaeology.

The final contribution to the volume by Markus is perhaps one of the more important as a reminder of how historical archaeology has played a significant role in making the hidden more visible in the study of the past. If historical archaeology in Arkansas is a largely hidden subject, the archaeology of the Jewish experience in antebellum Arkansas is an even greater unknown. Likely more than any other contribution in this volume, Markus' work exposes a diversity of experience that adds to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the past. The author not only begins to flesh out the Jewish experience on this antebellum frontier, but he also connects it with a more general consideration of the Jewish Diaspora.

Overall, this volume is essential reading for students of the archaeology, not just historical archaeology, of Arkansas. But, its value goes beyond a single state's borders. This volume should also be used by scholars and students of historical archaeology in the American South and the United States as a whole. The focus of many of the contributors on the interplay of history and historical archaeology is also a benefit for historians as they may seek a more materialist perspective on the past or perhaps discover what "hidden diversity" may lie beyond the written record.

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