Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

William Iseminger Oral History Interview

Michelle Ziegler, Interviewer

Cahokia Mounds Interpretative Center, Collinsville, Illinois

September 27, 2018

Michelle Ziegler (MZ): This interview is being conducted with William Iseminger, better known as Bill to most people, on behalf of the Madison County Oral History Project that is part of, part of the Madison Historical the Online Encyclopedia and Digitial Archive for Madison County Illinois. This interview takes place on Thursday, September 27, in 2018, at the Cahokia Mounds Historic Site Interpretative Center in Collinsville Illinois. The historic site is split between Madison County and St. Clair County, with Monk's Mound being in Madison County.

Bill Iseminger (WI): Correct.

MZ: The interviewer is Michelle Ziegler of the Museum Studies program at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Ok, so let's just start at the beginning [chuckle], where were you born and where did you grow up at?

WI: Well, I was born in Bloomington, Illinois and I grew up in Arlington Virginia. Went to the University of Oklahoma where I got a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and then did my master's degree in Anthropology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

MZ: Ok, so, you got your bachelor's in about what year?

WI: Bachelors in 1967 and the Masters in 1971.

MZ: So, what was it about anthropology that, that drew your attention?

WI: When I first got interested in anthropology/archaeology, I guess mainly archaeology, as a kid ah, my father's brother Uncle Wendell was an artifact collector who lived in Hayworth Illinois where the family home was in McCleane County. And whenever we visited the family ah, Uncle Wendle would take us kids out to the cornfields around McCleane County looking for Indian artifacts. That is what stimulated my interest and following that I did reading on it, and I've probably guess I've known since I was in 7th or 8th grade that I wanted to be an archaeologist. So that is sort of how it all started.

MZ: So, started collecting arrowheads [chuckle].

WI: Right. I never found a lot but ah, had fun doing it. Looking anyway. [chuckling]

MZ: I understand. Ok, ah. So, the other areas of anthropology just never really interested you or?

WI: Well, of course in anthropology you cover all kinds of aspects of human culture, including

linguistics, social anthropology, and physicial anthropology but my main interest was in archaeology and particularly North American and Midwestern archaeology where I ended up.

MZ: That's good. So, when did you first come to Cahokia Mounds? The very first visit.

WI: The first time I was here at Cahokia Mounds was 1968, ah, I was hired on a digging crew here that was being run by Dr. Melvin Fowler from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He had several projects at the Cahokia site at that time. And, I was working on the ah, it was called the south stockade behind the twin mounds, trying to locate where the defensive wall went around the southern part of sort of downtown Cahokia and we did indeed find that and several constructions of it… so that was my first visit and ah, experience at Cahokia.

MZ: So, what, what was your overall impression of the whole site when you first came?

WI: Of course, everybody including myself is always impressed at how big the site is and how big some of the mounds are compared to other mound sites. It was a really interesting experience. The dig we were on was mostly in gumbo clay really hard to dig with a sharpened shovel and it's really hard to imagine the Mississippians dug it with stone tools, but we were able to see the color differences of the soil that showed us where several different constructions of the defensive wall were located. But anyhow, it's always interesting to be able to work at the largest prehistoric site in America and as a first experience. It wasn't my first dig; my first dig was out in South Dakota back in 1963 and in between my freshman and sophomore years in college and ah, almost all my other other work has been here in Illinois. In 1967 I dug at Dickson Mounds up in central Illinois and in '68 here at Cahokia. then while I was in grad school down in Carbondale, I also conducted some surveys and excavations where Kinkaid Creek, used to be, is now Kinkaid Lake, and then also the lower 30 miles of the lower Kaskaskia River Valley whatever straightening out the river for barge traffic we are trying to locate sites and do some excavations of sites to identify were the cultural features were in that area. Then I was able to, as I finished up my masters, work at Carbondale. I went to an archaeology conference for Illinois archaeologists and the Illinois Archaeological Survey has an annual meeting and I ran into the fella who had been my supervisor when I worked at Cahokia in '68 and he asked what I was doing. I said, well I'm finishing up my master's I'm not interested at this point in going for a PhD. And he said, how would you like to work at Cahokia because he had just been offered a job to be the first on-site archaeologist through the Illinois State Museum and the state Museum wouldn't you have kind of a Joint operation here with the Department conservation which actually own the property and the little building where the old Museum was basically one small room with collections that various collectors had loaned or donated to the facility or. And there been up a couple women who had come the year before 1970 to revamp some of the exhibits. But the main part of that building was a ranger's residence, and he moved into a different house, uh, and then we were hired to uh, sort of modify that building into a small museum. So, we started with the existing one room and then we'd knock holes in walls and created from scratch basically on a lot of other exhibits and overtime we - not only Jim Anderson who was the man I was working with and myself and other people who were hired seasonally or in permanent positions - eventually had over 30 exhibits in that small museum. And we had added a couple of rooms to it and a small gift shop and mini theatre. We rebuilt Indian houses and Gardens in the backyard and started interpretive programs, educational programs, to the public archaeological field school which I ran for a number of years and a variety of other things.

MZ: I remember those days. When I first came here as a second grader. Right [chuckle]. Yeah, it was a nice little museum. So, when you first came here it was a park still correct?

WI: Right the first land was purchased here and 1925, it was 144 acres purchased from the Ramey family that owned much of the site and that included Monk's Mound and part of the grand plaza the twin mounds, mound 72 area … so sort of the central corridor through the core of the site and it stayed that way for a long time, but it was developed as a state park. So, they developed campgrounds and picnic areas, recreational equipment, swing sets, slides, teeter totters, and etc., ball diamonds. So, like most state parks it was primarily focused on recreation and stayed at that size until about the mid-1960s when they began to do more land acquisition through the Department of Conservation. And when I started here were somewhere around 600 acres and today, we have 2200 acres that the state owns. So, it was ah, it was I guess in the late '70s that we really started to refocus the management of the site from a park to a historic site, a state historic site and ah, so eventually they removed the campground as they developed the new campground up to Horseshoe Lake state park. The idea was to transfer all that activity up there. And then we also expanded some more land acquisition in the '70s and '80s … and there were several attempts over time to build a new museum at Cahokia, even some funding at one point, but for various reasons…the funding fell through or people couldn't decide where to put a museum that wouldn't impact the archaeology too much 'cause that was our main focus. And when we were in the late '70s first nominated to be on the world heritage list by UNESCO ah, we were not accepted initially because there wasn't a master management plan in place and they want to see more of a commitment from the state to what protecting and developing site and conserving and expanding protections for the site and so 1980 when there was a new, the first master management plan drawn up through the Department of Conservation and we were reentered into nomination for World Heritage status and that was approved in 1982 and it was soon after that that the state realized that had to do something more to tell the story than the little building that we had. And eventually, Governor Thompson released funds for constructing a new museum and ah, initially there had to be some archaeology done and also this area where they want to build this museum was at the end of a subdivision that has been built at the site in the 1940s …other over 60 some houses in the subdivision. They had previously acquired a few of those properties but they accelerated that after the decision was made to build at the end of where the subdivision was and for … fortunately over just a few years they were able to acquire all those properties save one house that the other assistant manager lives in. For a while the manager lived on the property too, but his house was in the middle of the plaza and they decided that that was not a good thing, so we were able to get some other property elsewhere nearby and the site manager then moved there. But there is still one house remaining of that subdivision where the other, the other asst manager lives at this time.

MZ: So how much … archaeological damage did the subdivisions and all the other development 'cause …I mean, other than I mean obviously knocking down a mound?

WI: Obviously the mounds are the most obvious feature of the site. Originally, we estimate about 120 mounds of which about 80 survive today in some form or another. Very few have escaped some alternation by modern man. Some smaller ones were plowed over by farmers, some had houses built on them, others were sold for fill, ah, highway subdivisions, discount stores impacted a number of the mounds, and ah. So quite a bit was damaged, but it's not just the mounds that we are concerned with, it's also the land all around the mounds, eh. Because that is where the people lived, that's where their houses were. Where their daily activities took place. Often, we learn more about them digging there than we do

in the mounds, so we try to preserve as much of that as we can. And we still have an ongoing land acquisition program through the Cahokia Mounds Museum Society, our support group, when they have funds available and there is a willing seller in another subdivision on the eastern border of our site, they have been acquiring properties to help protect and preserve more of the site because there are at least four mounds in that neighborhood. So far, they have acquired almost 60 properties and then turn those over to the state.

MZ: So what kind of process is there when you have to demolish those houses to do the minimum amount of damage to…

WI: Well, when the houses were built, they impacted or damaged the site … some of them had basements in the subdivision between where the museum sits today and so obviously that had impact on the site…and when we acquire a property it's the property owner that has to do the demolition um, and then try to stabilize or restore the property to stable condition. So that means that a lot of these sites, the houses didn't have, you know, sewer lines so they had septic tanks and cisterns in some cases, so there have been a lot of holes punched into the site with this construction. When the houses are removed, ah usually the foundations are collapsed into the hole, if there was a basement, or if there's not the slab would be removed. Septic tanks filled in with sand although we have discovered that that didn't always happen as it was supposed to. [chuckle] But ah, there is an attempt to, you know, stabilize the land again where it has been impacted by modern construction.

MZ: So, if I can just go back at little bit to the various stages the site has been through, what changes happen when it went from state park to state historic site, state historic site to world heritage site? I mean I know the latter is separate.

WI: Well again, in the 1970s when we decided to reclassify the site, and again that was the department of conservation, into a state historic site as opposed to a state park, the focus being more on cultural resources than recreational resources, so that gradually involved removal of campgrounds at the site, recreational equipment, backstops from the ball diamonds, and ah, teeter totters, slides and swing sets, and eventually also, um, when eventually built the museum here, or interpretative center as its official name, or interpretative center/museum, we also wanted to change ah, how the site was being used so we wanted to coordinate with the new facility and that meant closing off park roads that used to go through the site and making some of them into interpretive trails. And so, we eliminated a lot of the vehicular traffic and related problems that that caused. Also, for many years, this was a major spot for local citizens to have big picnics on the major holidays like Memorial Day and the fourth of July, Labor Day, and so there were thousands and thousands of cars and people here all up and down the roads, sometimes parked two and three deep so all that impacted the mounds too. So, people would climb up the mounds and where ever they climb, they made trails and when it rained it would wash out, we had gullies five and six feet deep, on a lot of the mounds so we had to fill in those gullies and do a lot of stabilization of the mounds as well. And so, we tried to emphasize and develop more interpretation signage, special events, and other kinds of programs that would give people more of an exposure to the cultural side of this site and that really expanded again after we got the World Heritage nomination. Like I said the state began acquiring more of the properties in the neighborhood. They had already acquired some adjacent agricultural lands ah but again the primary goal is the preservation and conservation of the site. Now in the mid '80s, 1985, what had been the Historic Sites Division of the Department of Conservation was split

out to create a new agency called the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency so cultural historical sites aroundthe state were now a part of that new agency with a primary focus on the cultural resources, whereas conservation still managed the state parks and other kinds of natural areas. And so, it really changed the emphasis of how we were managing the site. As I mentioned it with the world heritage listing in 1982 it resulted in a new facility here and again, as part of that we developed more of these interpretive trails and special events, special events, and special cultural activities and we are involved more with the American Indian community that they had been in previous times. So, a lot of changes occurred as a result of all that.

MZ: So, the site the historic site designation and the world heritage site designation is much larger than the park, is that correct?

WI: Yeah. The site grounds, like I said, the state of Illinois, now we changed again, and we are in the Department of Natural Resources, about a year or so ago the Governor dissolved the Historic Preservation Agency and merged it, the function into the department of natural resources, so we are not part of the historic sites division as part of that agency, now. Where was I going with this now? Ah, so there have been changes in the ways things are done and the way some of the site has been managed. We are experiencing a transitional period right now as we go into this new agency and because they are the one who primarily focus on again, the recreational, and natural resources throughout the state, basically it is what used to be the Department of Conservation but had other things over the years merged into it as well. A different focus on how the site is run, a lot more bureaucracy with this new agency than we've had to deal with before. So we are learning as well as they are learning how to deal with cultural sites again.

MZ: Right, well, let's see…

WI: I think I got off track whatever the original question was there…

MZ: Who shepherds, uh, shepherds it through the process of going from park to historic site and then to heritage center? I mean, does that come from here in the interpretative center or elsewhere?

WI: Those kinds of things are organized through the agency that we are part of. So initially it was the Department of Conservation, then the Illinois Preservation Agency, and ah, with the World Heritage designation, that is managed through the National Park Service. So, each country can nominate natural and cultural sites that they think are significant enough to be on that World Heritage list…and we were the first state-owned property on the World Heritage list, almost all the others were national parks or national monuments and still are today, there are few others now who are not. So originally, we were number 10 on the U.S. World Heritage list and now there are 23 and over a thousand worldwide. So, it's a focus on both natural and cultural site, world heritage committee looks at when they are approving sites, so now…but it done in cooperation with the state agencies that own the properties.

MZ: So, I know there has been some talk lately about the site becoming a federal park or federal historic site, what are… has it gone anywhere?

WI: There were several times in the past where that was examined, and the state was maybe interested in having the Park Service take over, and then the state was not interested in giving it up to the Park Service. In the past 7 or 8 years there has been kind of a movement to reexamine that possibility. The Heartland

Conservancy, which is a private non-profit, did a sort of a resource analysis and feasibility study ah what it would take to have Cahokia become a National Monument or part of a larger thing called a National Historical Park, not necessarily a National Park. Within the National Park Service there are about 30 different categories of monuments, parks and scenic areas and byways, etc. So, uh, but the ones that they are looking at the most closely were the National Monument and that is something that a president can nominate and push through but in all the others, whether it is a National Park or a National Historical Park - which would not just include Cahokia for instance but the other mound sites throughout the whole greater St. Louis metropolitan area and kind of an umbrella type thing - anything like that has to go through Congress. And we had hoped, you know, that President Obama before he went out of office would include it as a National Monument at least and maybe the other category would follow at some later date. But I guess it was almost at the last hour or so it didn't quite get passed through him and now with the current situation in politics [laughs] we don't see that happening really quickly but that feasibility was sent to the National Park Service by the Heartlands Conservancy and then the National Park Service did their own study and assessment, the local or regional out of, I think it's, Lincoln, Nebraska …and they submitted that to the national office and that is pretty much where it sits now and so they are examining it. But again, the atmosphere in D.C. at this point is kind of up in the air and I don't think it's going to be any real movement to create new places unless things start changing. But ah, so I think it will happen but even if it does, it's a long process. It'll take many years.

MZ: Right.

WI: The way it was always laid out it would be a joint operation between the state of Illinois and the National Park Service, so they would have a presence here. They would give us greater recognition and visibility perhaps more opportunities, probably better staffing. So, there are certainly advantages but there is a lot more levels of bureaucracy to deal with at the national level like that.

MZ: So how do you feel about it moving on to these changes? Is it…?

WI: Personally, I see it eventually happening but ah, I've always felt that we had a little more flexibility at doing things at the state level but, you know, the state is at such financial straits too. We have had to suffer over the years to get a bunch of cuts, personnel cuts and things. We are trying to slowly get back but ah, its a slow process and it probably, if it ever happens…could work a little better in that respect through the national level.

MZ: Do we have a site archaeologist who is just doing that?

WI: No, we never have, except those first few years ah when Jim Anderson and I started, we were both archaeologists. So, we were hired basically as museum curators, but we did archaeology. There is no site archaeologist, but the current site director Mark Essary and myself are archaeologists. But we don't do the archaeology… any archaeology done here is done by other institutions now. Or universities or other groups that have a research goal they are trying to answer, and they think that digging in certain places on the site are going to help answer those questions. So, they have to be qualified they have to be able to do the analysis, they have to write up the reports and get things published… there is a permitting process it goes through currently our agency for any work that is done here. So, there is no site archaeologist per say but there are archaeologists who are here including myself.

MZ: So how long have you been here and when do you consider you started?

WI: I started here full time in April 1971 so this coming April I'll be here 48 years.

MZ: Ok, is there a target in there, or …

WI: Well, I'm talking about retiring at the end of next year. I'll be I guess 49 years then or almost, and I'll be 75 then so I figure that is a good time to…

MZ: Yeah.

WI: When I retire, make a break, but I'll still be here a lot…

MZ: You can join the volunteers.

WI: …doing there are things I would eventually like to organize, better organize, the photographic files cause I'm probably the only one who knows what the photos are of… [chuckle] and ah, where they should be classified. We had them organized and classified by some volunteers in the past and ah, they weren't always very knowledgeable about what some of the images were so things got classified improperly so I would like to go through all those and there is thousands and thousands of them. Mainly slides which no one, you know, uses anymore but we do have those, they are basically historical documents of what went on here, the archaeology, the activities and everything else that went on here.

MZ: So, is there any plans to digitize those slides?

WI: We started doing some of that, you know, we recently acquired a scanner that will scanner about a dozen slides at a time. We had some of our interns or seasonal helpers begin to do some of that digitizing…so starting with most of the archeological ah, images getting those done first and we'll … categorize, yeah, we are starting to do that.

MZ: Ok, so right now currently you are the assistant manager for the site…

WI: Right.

MZ: …in charge of interpretation and public relations and of course, you're an archaeologist. So, what does it mean to be in charge of interpretation?

WI: Basically, ah, I oversee …what's being said about Cahokia through our volunteers, I train them, ah, our interns. I run the intern program. Ah, I help manage any changes in exhibits, what is being said about them, updating things that are … as we go through the years there have been a lot of changes in the archaeology, in the analysis that has been done, or reanalysis … changing our interpretations of ideas so we gotta update the exhibits on that. I do a lot of the public speaking, ah to groups and organizations, I also do the presentations on the media interviews, radio, TV, ah film crews, managed the film crews that come here and often do interviews for various cable channels and education channels and things that are out there. Ah so a little bit of everything and make sure all the literature that we put out for the public is correct, you know, and that obviously does involve revising from time to time, so that is kinda what the

interpretation aspect is.

MZ: So, you have a role in developing any new exhibits or, or ah, probably you have been here for a lot of them that are here already?

WI: Yeah with the exhibits, I do oversee most any changes that take place in those, or upgrades or updating information. Also, and developing new exhibits, working closely with the exhibit designers and fabricators. Also, we have temporary exhibits from time to time and most of these are exhibits our interns prepare. So, I work very closely with them ahem, make sure again that it's done properly and the information is correct. So, yeah, I'm in involved in sort of all aspects of exhibitory… [chuckle]

MZ: What exhibits would you like to see here that aren't here yet?

WI: Well, one that it's very hard to nail down, a little more information on the cosmology and beliefs based on what we know about the Mississippian culture and some of their descendants and some of the information we have of later peoples and their beliefs and how things we see archaeologically seems to reflect some of those same kinds of beliefs. On that ah, we just recently, has been almost 3 years now, put in a new exhibit on wetlands and waterways. How the Indians utilized the resources of the river bottoms and plain, the river and backwater lakes and everything else. We hadn't really addressed that very much in the initial exhibits so there are things like that ah, there's a few exhibits we would need to update. For instance, mound 72 exhibits because new analyses done by people of the University of Illinois are changing some of our ideas about what was there and what that represents and so we've got to do some updates like that from time to time. We have a history of the archaeology, the panels that we have up now kinda stopped around 2000 so we have almost 20 more years of research that has been going on…so those are things we are talking about doing and ah, in a process right now of ah, doing an exhibit on other Mississippian sites. We used to have a flip book or notebook kind of thing for people to flip the pages … we did some of our, revised some of other exhibits and we had to get that one out of the way. Because it was taking up space we needed for another exhibit. So now we are going to be putting that information on a vertical panel that is currently blank, going to use the space as best we can. Ah

MZ: What sites do you think compare the best with Cahokia? Other sites…

WI: Well, there are several major Mississippian sites in the south, for instance, Moundsville Alabama which is the second largest surviving site after Cahokia, ah Etowah Mounds in Georgia, Ocmulgee Mounds in Georgia, Angel Mounds in Indiana, Kincaid Mounds in Illinois… Aztalan in Wisconsin, those are some of the major sites that we talk about, Spiro mound in Oklahoma. So there are you know, we try to ah get across to people that this was not one culture but an amalgam of many different cultures that we collectively refer to as Mississippian so I often tell people it's like we use the term European, you know, it was a certain similarity of European culture or Asian culture but we know there is a difference in language and geography and lifestyles and other things, but there are certain shared characteristics that… these people have, the same was true with the Indians cultures especially the Mississippians so …try to make people realize that this was a, ah a cultural system or tradition that's covered a very broad area with a lot of interaction a lot of trade in connection with each other.

MZ: So, there would have been … multiple tribes?

WI: Right, different tribes, different languages basically the same way of life with regional variations.

MZ: Ok, ah.

WI: Another thing we would like to do with some of the recent work ah that was done for instance in East St. Louis and St Louis - talk about the mound groups there. There are huge mound centers there and East St Louis there are about 50 mounds at one time, and downtown St. Louis another 26 or 27 mounds that are right across the river from each other and probably controlling trade and traffic along the rivers. And access to Cahokia probably had to go through East St. Louis to get to Cahokia, so and unfortunately those were slashed through, they thought mostly destroyed and St. Louis pretty much is as the city built up there but what we discovered when they were building the new bridge in East St. Louis to go across the river, they encountered a huge settlement that we, much bigger than we anticipated being there that was associated with that mound complex, and just in the small area they dug they found over 1400 houses and over 4000 pits, and that is probably only 10% of that site that was there . That is a much more massive complex that we now call Greater Cahokia which includes Cahokia Mounds, East St. Louis and St. Louis Mound Groups and all the surrounding smaller communities a that were all part of this metropolitan area in prehistoric times.

MZ: So, we've talked before about Mitchell also being at the, ahm, northern end of the American Bottoms, ah …. The so-called Big Mound on Laclede's Landing, how did it compare to ah sites that are here?

WI: Yeah it was the largest mound in the St Louis complex, and I think it was about 40 feet tall, I forgot the other dimensions but …probably was a ridge-shaped mound, and those are kind of unique to the Cahokia area. And that is right about it was eventually leveled by 1870 as they used the dirt for fill to fill build railroads and roads and things like that in St. Louis and that's today where the new bridge lands on the Missouri side of the river is right about where Big Mound used to be and another large one in what was sometimes called was caused, sometimes called Cemetery Mound in East St. Louis, because later Anglo settlers and others used it for their burials but apparently there was Indian burials there as well. From the earlier period. But unfortunately, as those cities grew they leveled most of those mounds, used the dirt for fill and elevating other parts of the city that were growing in the 1800s and ah, a lot was lost but what we have found is that the bases of a lot of those mounds in East St. Louis are still there beneath the city rubble and so we can still see a lot of the habitation zones and mound bases beneath what's left to the city there today.

MZ: They didn't want to dig too deep into the clay? [chuckle]… So here at the interpretive site or center, what is the message or the Big Idea that you want visitors to take away from the whole site?

WI: Yeah, our Big Idea was always the urban nature of Cahokia the fact that it was an Indian City; ah, it wasn't just a village or a tribe but it was a an amalgam of people who moved here ah, to become part of the big city…when Cahokia really grew exponentially around 1050 AD, a lot of smaller sites were abandoned as people moved into the big city, I guess. But what we're really seeing increasing evidence of, as we do more excavations now only at Cahokia but also at some of the surrounding sites, a lot of immigration from Arkansas, southeast Missouri, and parts of Indiana and Kentucky based on the pottery and other things we see and we know come from those areas, so people were immigrating into Cahokia

and with the new analysis of the burials from mound 72, looking at the strontium levels in the teeth they can determine that at least 30% of the burials there are non-locals, are not from this area, from someplace else …now a lot of those were sacrificial burials … so we don't know if they were local people or people who moved here, people who were captives, or if they were married into the society, … we don't know how they selected those people.

MZ: Or slaves…

WI: But we do know that a lot of them were ah, coming from other places. We are still trying to figure out where some of those places are…

MZ: Or hostages?

WI: Could be, ah we don't see much evidence of what we what call slaves in Indian society…ah, there are a few examples here and there, but they often did … captured mainly women and children, talking about of what later Indian were doing, so we assume they did too. A lot of times they were adopted into Indian society became part of the captor's society and that may well have been happening with some of those examples here at Cahokia.

MZ: Ok, ah, of all the excavations that you have taken part of here and elsewhere, of the Mississippian societies, which one was the most exciting for you to work on?

WI: I think probably the summer I worked at Dickson Mounds, 1967 before I came here. They were getting ready to build a new museum… up there and the old museum had over 230 *in situ* [*in situ* = in place; bodies/skeletons], still exposed in their original positions, exposed, so we knew there was a cemetery there. They were going to incorporate the burial site into one of the wings of the museum so where we were digging was sort of outside of where that wing would be, to recover and remove anything that might be there, before the new building went up… so we were digging burials which were fascinating in many ways but they were something that we don't do much in archaeology anymore because of native people have raised objections and concerns about disturbing human remains a lot of people seem to think that, you know, that is all archaeologists do is dig up bones, you know [chuckle]…that is one of the mythologies of archaeology, I guess. It's always been a small aspect of what archaeologists do. But we do it even less now and about the only times where we work with burials … about the only time is where there is a highway going through and there is going to be some impact and they can't reroute the highway for some reason. We try to leave burials in place. If we come across them, we do document them as much as we can but we don't remove them from the ground except in rare circumstances…so for me that kind of a fascinating aspect of it… although nearly everything we do as archaeologists we think is exciting (laughing). It is very mundane a lot of the times but a lot of the focus of what I did here at Cahokia is tracing where the stockade wall went around the center of the site and part of the problem is that the site was so heavily occupied for so long that there has been reuses of the same plot of land over and over for hundreds of years … they built these walls right through where people lived. So, we have found evidence of house and pits, as well as posts and trenches they dug to set the walls. Sometimes just digging through one 2- meter square you can see where there is a sequence of 7 or 8 activities that superimpose each and and trying to unravel that is kind of the challenge of archaeology. I always find that fascinating trying to find the sequence of activities that took place at any particular spot. And the other project I was involved

on here was back in 1985 … we had a donation from a local couple to reconstruct the woodhenge …that Dr. Ewan Withrey (sp?) …. In the early 60s and late 70s and we wanted to reconstruct one of the circles and we wanted to do it where the original was so he had identified most of the posts for what we call circle number 3 which would have had 48 posts in the circle… we were missing some in the northeast side so I had a field school out there in the summer of 1985 to check those areas and see if we could find those posts and we did. We found those three locations, so we were able to reconstruct the circle as best as best we could at that point. And so that was interesting so to be able to find something where you predict it should be (laughing) Most of the time we are surprised in archaeology, we think we know where things are but there is a lot of technology nowadays to help us narrow down where to dig. …use remote sensing, the radar, the magnanometry…electronic resistivity and conductivity using these instruments across the ground it detects where the soil has been disturbed… where people lived, had houses and built walls and dug pits. These things so up just through these sensing instruments…and they plot maps of the distribution of these things, so it really helps us to focus to know where to dig. We call "ground truthing" to confirm what we see on those computers' printout with actual excavations.

MZ: So, if you finding 7 or 8 different layers of things how well does the ground penetrating radar or the remote sensing do for that?

WI: It gets very confused…when you have certain areas of a site where the densest occupation was it will show you there was a lot of activity there, but it doesn't really help. It is difficult to isolate one feature from another … if they are actually superimposing on top of each, its not other not necessarily layers… its the same surface of ground used over and over again. So, it ah it's not separated by stratigraphy shall we say.

MZ: What is your favorite interpretive activity that comes out here or that you take part in?

WI: There is two things I do more than other things, I guess. I do the observations of the equinoxes and the solstices at the reconstructed woodhenge and … when we first built that in 1985 we figured after a couple of years would lose interest in it…well, I'm still doing it and its 2018…so its been a number of years and but, I still enjoy getting out there and I get up on a step ladder and have the people gather around me while we are waiting for the sun to show up and I explain how we discovered woodhenge, how it works and what we know about it. …and hopefully the sun shows up. …hopefully, it's not cloudy or raining …I've been out there with an umbrella and …I've been out there in a snowstorm …but sometimes on the horizon there might be a break in the clouds and you will see the sun. We usually do it on the Sunday morning closest to the actual event so more people can come out. …we make it an educational experience …we don't do any ceremonies since we are not Indians …don't think it would be appropriate to play Indian. So those kinds of things like that … I do the nature/culture hikes a few times a year ah Archaeology Day, I think, is always a fun experience…expose people to what archaeologists do and ancient technologies. I think those are probably the things I most enjoy working with.

MZ: Okay, ah, what is the, is the most unique thing that has been found here?

WI: I don't know, I guess the most unique thing is the Birdman tablet…that has become the logo or symbol for Cahokia…sandstone tablet about 4 inches tall with a figure of a man wearing a birdlike mask holding a wing up in a dancing posture and the flip side has cross-hatching pattern… so we think what is

represented there is the different spiritual realms that most Indian peoples believe in the upper world represented by the bird most likely represented by a falcon or hawk ah, this world, the middle world where there are people, the man represents that, and the cross- hatching is a representation of snakeskin or the underworld or lower world. How they used that stone we don't know and right now I'm doing some research on other tablets from other sites, as well as other tablets from this site that have been found and trying to do a comparative study but that is one of the few that has been found intact and complete and that has become sort of our symbol for Cahokia Mounds. It's probably one of the more unique things that has been found here.

MZ: Has the Cahokian design been found elsewhere?

WI: There are designs that we associate with Cahokia especially on pottery. What is called Ramey Incised Pottery. It's a bowl, or a jar is the official term we use, inslanting shoulder and usually on that shoulder there are interlocking scroll designs or several variations of that motif. It seems to originate here in Cahokia and spread to other areas, so you see imitations of it as well as the pots themselves being transported to distant areas.…ah so that motif spreading. And also, we think that a lot of the figurines that made out of what what's called Missouri Flint clay, which comes from the west side of St. Louis, …reddish color stone, semi-hard or semi-soft, however you want to say it. It was carved into little statuettes or figurines, sometimes they were also made into pipes that were smoked in ceremonies, but we think that most of those were actually made here at Cahokia even though they are found in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama and other places, Tennessee, but they have been able to identify the signature of that particular stone and that stone is coming from that one source, not too far from here, so we think that Cahokia was, the Cahokians were making those figurines and perhaps as they spread, we think spreading a new religion out of Cahokia in the early 1050s-1100 AD, or so. These are representations of the culture heroes and the mythology, and the beliefs and as they tell the story and …as they spread this new religion, they are probably taking these figurines with them and taking them to these other more remote areas.

MZ: Well, red stone like that is… not all that common…

WI: Right

MZ: …elsewhere in the country also

WI: It looks very similar to what's called pipestone which is from up in Minnesota, but its chemical signature is very different and but, with certain instruments, we can detect, so it's local or some other things…

MZ: Yes, I've seen quite a bit of Missouri's orange clay basically, basically when it's still clay before it gets compressed.

WI: The name is unfortunate because it's really not a clay. It may have started out millions of years ago as a clay, but as it turned into stone it hardens. I guess when it's first exposed it's a little softer and the term soft isn't very relevant here. [chuckle]

MZ: You have to get a lot of rain for it to get soft.

WI: Similar to soapstone I guess, where it's a little bit easier to carve but as it's exposed it hardens as well so it's really a type of stone even though it's called flint clay.

MZ: At one point it was clay, ok… so one thing I want to come back to … is we talked a little bit about acquiring property. What's the attitude of people in the close vicinity to the property being taken or?

WI: Something we have had to deal with for years, it is always been this folklore rumor that the state is going to buy everybody out and take over their property and that has never been the plan for the state to do that. That may be our 100-year plan, eventually we would like to get all those properties, but it's not going to be a takeover, or condemnation, or eminent domain kind of situation. The state does not like to get involved in eminent domain unless it's really, really necessary. So right now the properties that our museum society buys from the local neighborhood here is always done on a willing seller basis, people who are willing to sell. And they have to negotiate the prices. We can't buy structures, we can buy property so if there is a structure on the property, they have to add the demolition cost into their asking price, so a lot ofthem people have had their houses foreclosed or their tax due on them and they just don't have the funds and are willing to sell, or other the house burned or if someone dies and the family doesn't want to have to deal with it, …so we have been able to at a fairly reasonable prices so our museum society has a land acquisition fund and people can contribute to help with that process. It was a little bit easier when we were under the Historic Preservation Agency, now witj the Department of Natural Resources they are not used to having property transferred to them like that and it's much more lengthy process to get it done.

MZ: Does the state have the option to sort of being the first buyer when people do decide to sell?

WI: Not the state but museum society, their support group, a not-for-profit organization, theyare the ones that we funnel all this through and then when they acquire the property then they transfer it to the state, but the state is not actively going out at this point to acquire property… and ah. Yeah.

MZ: Ok. Of all the mounds that have been lost over all the years, which one or which area do you think was the greatest loss?

WI: Oh that is a hard question to answer…there was a big mound at the western edge of the site called Powell Mound that the farmer who owned it leveled it in 1931 and it was probably the second largest mound at the site at the time, and so that was a major loss, plus not only, in the center of the site, we have not only a subdivision where the interpretive center sits today that impacted the site … plus the subdivision to the east of here, called State Park Place which was started in the 1930s. The one that was here where the interpretive center is was started in the 1940s. But so those kinds of things, residential developments and commercial developments along the highway that runs through our site. Collinsville Road used to be US 40 and so there has been a lot of commercial development so people have to drive through a lot of kind of low economic areas, thats how we say it, as they approach the site are things we would like to eventually improve if we do that through land acquisition or donations, or whatever, we would like to do that. But ah

MZ: And, it's been that way for as long as I can remember.

WI: Yeah, it's [incoherent] And there were two mounds that were destroyed by a department store called

Grandpas that was right across the street from us here. You can still see the bases of the mound kind of under the foundation of the building and for many years they operated as a very successful store and then they moved and then … it was used … (jumbled) as a warehouse, by other companies as a warehouse for a while but it's really become run down. The state was able to acquire that property through some, a grant money, a fund that we had to acquire other properties elsewhere and what was left over was used to acquire that old, old store but not enough funds left to do demolition and get rid of it… we would like to eventually get it torn down, do some of the archaeology, recover information we can about the mounds and the occupation impacted and then make that into a green space that would be much more attractive to our site than it is today.

MZ: Ah, so a lot of the discoveries in the American Bottoms have come from highway crews, or road crews, right? Ah, so what has been the response of the state, and the construction crews and the community at large to the discoveries? And to letting those discoveries be…

WI: There are different levels we are talking about here. Contractors, the road builders, they hate to have to deal with archaeology. Often times they tell their labors, if you see something don't tell anybody because its time and money to them, and that's their profession, that means delays…ah but a different example was when interstate 255 was under construction or planned in advance of the building of the interstate, … let me back up a little bit …that highway was initially supposed to go through Cahokia, through Cahokia Mounds and that is how we discovered woodhenge, when archaeologists were digging where there was going to be an overpass and cloverleaf stuff associated with this new highway that was suppose to link up with interstate 55/70 that was under construction in the 1960s…the money for what was supposed to be interstate 255 was not in place yet when it finally was in place by the late 1960s there were new federal laws that made it more difficult to build through a place like this so they decided to move the highway a couple miles to the east where it runs today. But that was one of the few times when archaeologists and the federal government, Department of Transportation and others were working together, and ah archaeologists were able to dig a lot of the sites that were impacted by the highway during the advance, and during the construction as well, and they think located and researched over 100 sites that were within the right of way of its borrow pits. And ah so it's gone about several million dollars that went into the archaeology but really gave us a lot of new insights into what was going on in this part of the world so not …just from the past… looking at Cahokia from the inside out…we are seeing all these outlying sites that were related to Cahokia and how they and changed through time and communicated with Cahokia… a look from the outside in.

MZ: So that is one of the few times the state really has altered a project to avoid… that I can think of…

WI: …that was back, not so much the state as the federal, it was the federal law, but yeah …so it was a lot of money, but a lot of research and a lot of good information came out of it. It had expensive publications and research and analysis and really, we learned a lot from that kind of cooperation that doesn't happen often enough, you know?

MZ: Right, so the community was …how did they respond…particularly to the delays I guess of the highway construction?

WI: I don't know if we know enough about how people felt about that. It didn't really delay the

construction. It was going on prior to …once they determined what the route would be… the archaeologist would start right working away but some of it was done with big machines running around them. Archaeology is a slow process, methodical and it has to be, to document everything you are doing and so I think a lot of times people who are the contractors working on the highway felt a kind of connection, you know, and in some case felt some pride about being able help to be a part of learning more about this ancient culture, others had little concern at all. As far as the local communities, the highway would certainly make some of them more accessible. It would also avoid, rerouting traffic away from their communities. So anytime there is a big superhighway built there is a changes in economy. In the ways local communities communicate with the public

MZ: So, it didn't change the timespan or the acquisition dates for the property?

WI: Not really, no.

MZ: So, the state had acquired the property for the highway and then …

WI: But again, that was mostly federal …side roads and exists and access to the community around basically lead to economic development in many cases and changes the way the communities were laid out. A lot of it hasn't happened too much in this area, but in a lot of parts of the state you can see these old downtown areas where older communities are just dead because the highway went around them and not through them.

MZ: Yeah, no exit. So, how much has this site creeped into your personal life? You have been here a long time.

WI: April will be 48s years, in many ways it's become my life. I have always enjoyed working here and never thought about going any place else. … a joke, either I found my niche, or I have no ambition. (laughing) I never really thought about going any place else I've survived several different agencies and several different site directors. I never wanted to be in charge because running a site involves dealing with personnel and budgets. I just wanted to do what I do. Even there was an opportunity at one point where I might have been given the opportunity to be site manager but I never really wanted to deal with that and I'd seen what the other managers had to go through and people they had to deal with, … even when I retire, like I said, I'll probably be down here a lot, I probably still do a lot of the woodhenge equinox/solstice things for them, I'll still be involved in some of the organizations, support groups, so it will still be part of my life… I won't have to get up so early…I'm a night owl anyway, I like to sleep in, in the morning and I like to stay up at night.

MZ: Me too!

WI: I don't have one of those built-in clocks where I wake up at any particular time…so that is good.

MZ: I seem to recall that you met someone rather important to your life here?

WI: Well I… are you talking about my wife?

MZ: Well yeah

WI: Didn't meet here here actually…I didn't meet her here.

MZ: Ah, ok, I thought you did.

WI: But soon after we meet, she was heavily involved in what I do. She helped at the old museum, she sometimes would come down and help clean, or she help with some of the experimental archaeology projects we had. It became part of her life, it became a new exposure for her, but … I didn't actually meet her here.

MZ: Ah, ok.

WI: Now Matt, the other assistant manager, met his wife, who was a volunteer here, and so they

got married but ah. Didn't quite happen that way.

MZ: Ok, maybe I was thinking of Matt…

MZ: I'm sitting here looking at this painting on the wall, which is a very common, ah commonly used in our brochures and so forth, and who painted that?

WI: I painted that.

MZ: Are any of the, the others yours?

WI: Nothing that you see here. A lot of these paintings that you see here …one to the right of mine were done by National Geographic magazine by one of their artists…another Readers Digest books did the one above it. … so, people are always asking for pictures of what Cahokia might have looked like and so we had to send them to National Geographic or somebody else to get what they wanted. There were a few others that we were able to use… but ah, so I always wanted to something that we didn't have to go through all those copyright concerns and other sources, something we would have ourselves. So, I decided to do a painting and I bet it appeared in a couple hundred other publications other museum exhibits, you know, TV shows and everything you can think of. so its I wanted to something because I was familiar with the site and I knew where things were, and I guess where some other things were but ah, I wanted to have something that was accurate.

MZ: Well, it's a very good painting, also.

WI: Thank you.

MZ: When did you paint it. I think it was '91 when I finally finished it. I worked on it, on and off for 2-3 years. There is a lot of detail in there and I get burned out after a while and I'd put it aside and then I'd go back and work on it some more. Once we opened the museum here ah and were getting a lot more attention and publicity… even though we had some of these others that were done for the exhibits, those fours over there, those were available for people to use… a lot of them wanted an aerial view, which mine had done, which shows the scale of the site better than some of the others do.

[There are mock-ups or prototypes for all the murals in the museum on the walls of the office space.

Some are identical to the mural, others are larger than the murals.]

MZ: So, that was done almost 25, 35 years ago then.

WI: Yeah.

MZ: So what would you change in that picture to make it…

WI: Well what we have discovered is the west side of the stockade wall now comes in a little closer, …probably more here, curved to go around this mound, and we don't know where it goes here. So that is conjectural or where it is in some of these spots in the north. Those would be the main things I would change. I guess, maybe even Monks mound, we are showing that, what is called, the second terrace on the side as being a nice flat area. But we know that it was probably originally at the top of the mound and collapsed at some point. Then they modified that and added the front terrace on the mound So what I've, what I've shown here is a blending of many different centuries into one time shot, so probably not all those were standing at exactly the same time. Woodhenge we now know is between 1100 and 1200 AD, the stockade wall wasn't there at the beginning. It was first put up maybe a little before 1200 and was there about a hundred years. So, I show all these things in the same picture, but they were not all necessarily standing at the same time. And I might show few more houses here and there, or less in certain spots or indicate the plazas a little better. Things I would change if I have to do it all over again… maybe with photoshop (laughs). I could change few things.

MZ: So, is painting a hobby other than?

WI: It was for many years, yeah and then since the mid-90s I really haven't gotten into it. I used to, I just sort of got interested in painting when I first moved to Collinsville, neighbors, a lady who was taking some painting classes from someone who taught out of her house, so she invited me to go along so I did that for a while and then … I guess probably the 3rd artist who taught out of his home that I spend the most time with was really who I learned the most from, so I never had any formal training, schoolwork or anything. I always had a sort of a little bit of a natural talent, so the painting came to me fairly easily.

MZ: Most people probably don't realize how much art goes into archaeology.

WI: Oh yeah

MZ: having to draw out the sights and artifacts…

WI: I did a book a few years ago called *Identifying and Understanding Artifacts of Illinois and Neighboring States* because we didn't have a good book…a lot of them have arrowhead types or spear point types and they don't have all the types of artifacts and we really needed something like that. And so, I did that, and I did over 700 illustrations for that, all hand drawn, that show everything from little flakes to knives…to arrowheads to pots to bone tools, axes, you name it. So, that was an endeavor. I did that for the Illinois Association for the Advancement of Archaeology. I'm the editor for their occasional journal and we made that a special issue of one of the journal, so I didn't get, no money for that but ah, it was a …one of things that I'm most proud of that I have done because that is the something that people who are interested in archaeology, collectors, amateurs can learn from so I didn't just draw the artifacts out. I also

explain you know, how they were made, were used, were shaped, what kind of material they are made from so it's an educational tool as well.

MZ: Sort of like a museum catalog

WI: yeah…I also did a book on Cahokia called *Cahokia Mounds: America's First City*… and ah, you know it was something that I had been toying with for a long time. A lot of my colleagues had written books on archaeology but a lot of them are geared more for other archaeologist and not for the general public…. My career here has been mostly in Public Archaeology so I wanted to do something that at the more general without a lot of jargon 'cause that is the one thing I have been doing, talks and things I give on Cahokia programs and things that I do have always been dealing with the general public. I knew better than some of my colleagues how to address the public so it's been a big seller in the gift shop, so I do get royalties from that. … Yeah, that's another thing I really felt proud about.

MZ: It's a good book; I've read it. Ok… [Bill takes a break]

MZ: So, we were talking about your book… Cahokia: The First city, first American city…

WI: America's First City, so do you have any plans for future books?

WI: Well, I'm working on a book right now but it's nothing to do with archaeology or Cahokia…

MZ: Ah, ok.

WI: It's a history of my great-grandfather's Civil War regiment out of McClean County, Illinois. So, I had two great grandfathers that were in the same regiment and we have copies of their letters and diaries, so I've been able to track down another 20 soldiers' letters and diaries. So, I 've been working on a day by day journey of these people through the three years they were. They started out in Missouri, then Arkansas, and then down to Vicksburg, and then down in Louisiana, and then they got stuck in Brownsville, Texas for 9 months and end up in Mobile Bay for a siege and battles there. and then that was pretty much the end of the war but ah.… It's been fascinating, when I've tried to visit all the locations that they talk about or as many as I could, I haven't made it to Brownsville yet. But ah, that's my ambitious project right now. Right now, I've gone through all the diaries so for each day, for each week, there are all these entries for these people, so trying to summarize each of those and blend it all together and then maybe insert the letters on the opposite page that correspond to the dates and times and activities. Then also eventually get all the official records and documents and things about their travels and battles and things and sort of doing it piecemeal all at a time… it's a long project.

MZ: Time to work on family

WI: Genealogy is something else I'm interested in, so I get involved in that.

MZ: So, has your family been in Illinois for very long?

WI: My father's family is from Illinois since the 1830s to 1850s, that period. In different branches of the family, yeah. My mother's family is from upper New York and Canada. Yeah, but the original Isemingers

immigrants were like in the 1750s in Maryland and that area.

MZ: It fun to go back on those branches, I've got some too. OK, ah. I think we have just about… is there anything that you would like to add that I didn't ask?

WI: Yeah, I think you pretty well covered it.

MZ: Ok. I think I…

WI: I guess the only thing I might say I've always enjoyed working here, there have been stressful times, but I never really thought about going anywhere else and I like to feel that I've made a difference.

MZ: Oh, I think you definitely have… on behalf of the volunteers, of which I am one, we are very happy you are here to teach us and someone we can turn to when a visitor has a question that we don't have any clue. (laughing)

MZ: Oh, one thing I was going to ask you, what is the strangest visitor theory that they have come here to try and confirm.

WI: Well, I've got sitting on my desk right now, because someone else was asking about that the other day, I've got what I call my fantasy file and it's about this thick, 4-5 inches think of various things people have sent or emailed or written ah and a lot of it deals with not so much aliens and things like that…

[Bill gets a phone call]

WI: Oh, where was I?

MZ: I asked you what else you would like to add and, oh the file.

WI: The fantasy file. Yeah, but a lot of people think there is vibrations or all the … people feel the spiritual connections, others are looking for linkages between sites through what they call lay lines of power and connection to different parts of the world, parts of the country and other countries and these are people who many times are … mathematicians or people who specialize in studying numbers and ah geometry and things like that… what they are saying will probably look very logical to another mathematician or other, but to an archaeologist, we, it's very difficult to put much faith in some of those theories, oh… well the weirdest thing happened I guess just a couple of weeks ago…when we had artifact identification day and you know …this couple said they had a special stone that has all kinds of pictures in it and stuff. I was expecting something carved with designs and motifs, but they had a little pebble that has a natural concretion, looks like an iron concretion, and she had taken over a 1000 pictures of this little thing and blown them up and so she was getting all these light and dark reflections and things where she could see all kinds of faces and there on one side they said they could see the Collinsville Kahawk Indian, they could see Lincoln's assassination, they could see all these other things…and aw man, you try to be nice to these people and tell them no its just a rock. We get a lot of people who bring a rock and where see faces and things and there are patterns. And I tell people, it's like looking at clouds, you can see whatever you want. But no, they say this has been carved and I say no this has what something looks like that has been carved, and I try to show them pictures and examples of artifacts that are actually carved and shaped

by the Indians. I've even got a little geode, that I forget where I got it, but it had been cut in half and polished and the patterns in there are really colorful and unique and I can see a pattern, I call it my cartoon rock. I tell people to look at that and tell me what you see, well they see all different kinds of things, and I put my overlay on it, and there's Winnie the Pooh and Snoopy. So, you see you can see whatever you want in a rock but that doesn't mean it's there. It's your mind that sees it there. Something that is real artifact is actually made, they are very distinctive, but most people, you can't convince them. They aren't here to hear what they have; they are here to tell you what they have. And it's frustrating sometimes.

MZ: How many times have people tried to sell you things for the museum?

WI: Well, there are always people, you know, who, a lot of people inherit collections from their fathers or grandfathers or there selling an estate and they find this box full of artifacts. We really can't accept anything unless we know they came from Cahokia or we they are part of a …help fill a gap in our exhibitor displays and things so we have to tell them no we don't do that. We can recommend that they donate it to the Illinois State Museum and if they want to take a tax write off, they have to do that themselves, but we don't buy or sell artifacts. I think a lot of people want to know how much is this worth. We never talk about the value of artifacts. The reason behind that is if you tell people that an ax or an arrowhead is worth $200, $500, $1000 or something, they might out and dig up the ground to find more artifacts to sell… and that means they are destroying a site. It's part of our archaeological ethics that we don't ever talk about value about artifacts other than to say yeah that's valuable and its important, but you should keep it. And you should document where you are finding things … don't get involved in buying and selling. A lot of people who buy artifacts often buy fakes…there is a lot of people who make replicas and fakes and unless you know…sometimes it hard for us to even tell if they are real or not. In fact, the last our ID day a fellow had corresponded with me previously and had sent pictures of one of these figurine pipes, like made of that red clay, red flint clay but it turned out to be some other kind of stone yet. We don't know just what kind, some other kind of red stone, and yet but ah it had all the right kind of basic form to it, but every time you look at it you see something that just doesn't look quite right. You know the way the face is done, the lips are done, the ears, or eyes, the way it is polished or not polished in certain spots. Ah just doesn't look right it just raises flags for those of us who have seen a lot of these things. But that doesn't mean that it's not real. It may be someone who was less skilled or tried to show something different that was we are used to seeing because each one of them is something unique… and this guy had, I guess, bought it 15 or 20 years ago from the wife of a man who died who was a collector. So, we don't know where he got it…apparently somewhere in Oklahoma, allegedly, but you know it just didn't look right to say yes, that's an authentic artifact so they are going to try to do some more tests on it, but anyway you know you get those types of things quite often. Almost every week we get somebody who brings something in. Just a spear point they found or a rock that fits just right in your hand… of course, if you have it in your hand, it fits right in you hand. It's got this indentation, well that's a natural indentation. It doesn't mean that the Indians didn't pick it up and think the same thing. they picked up rocks because it was the right shape, that doesn't mean that they made it into that shape, it's a natural shape that someone may have used. But a lot of people just are more willing than others to say oh yeah will think that it's just a rock and will look good in their rock garden. Others are just so sure that it is something, it's just really hard to convince someone who has convinced themselves that they have got this special stone.

MZ: So, for the record, is there anything, any structures underneath Monk's Mound?

WI: Well, the vertical coring we have done through Monk's Mounds shows that it is all solid earth. Now a few years ago when we were doing some repairs on the east, the west side of Monk's Mound, we had some slumping occurring and we did some horizontal boring and tried to install drains to get water of the mound that is causing a lot of the slumping problems, and one of the corings, borings they went in horizontally and were in about 150 feet about 40 feet below what we call the second terrace and they drilled through about 30 feet of rocks. Now, we don't know how fare those go beyond where they bored. or above or below. All we know is that for at least 32 feet or so there is rocks under there, and we don't know what it is. The rock had to be brought there because there is no rock in the soil here. It is probably limestone, ah probably cobbles rather than a big boulder, and a whether it's a ceremonial platform, or a tomb or a wall or a structure we don't know. We know it's not under the whole mound, just under that isolated area. The testing that we have done so far, we haven't been able to penetrate deep enough with these instruments to get down to where the stone is where and we are going to keep trying to better define its limits and it's still too deep to dig down to…would have to dig 40 feet down and we don't want to do that.

MZ: Yeah, you would destroy the mound basically.

WI: And we don't want to do that…. so, it's going to be one of those mysteries. So, what we see in almost every mound we have looked at is what they seem to do first is strip the ground, strip off the sod and build the mound. Sometimes they reuse that dirt in the building of it, level the area and sometimes they might put down a layer of special soil that had meaning to them. Whether its sand or colorful or whatever, but a lot of times there had been some other building there, some kind of ceremonial building in use with that sacred spot but now with a mound over it. Where that building used to be, of course, they are wooden buildings that don't survive but sometimes we can see the patterns in the soil and where it had been. But Monks Mounds is based a lot on the coring that has been done that the mound is pretty much the same height that it originally was in its final construction anyway and its final construction but most of the changes are on the sides where there has been erosion and slumping and other things going on. And there was a farmhouse build on the top back in the 1830s. So there has been modern impact to it as well.

MZ: And is there still a modern grave on top?

WI: Amos Hill who built the house there in 1830s is buried up on that northwest corner up on top, when they were digging back in the '60s they came across his grave from the knees down. They could see the bones and see the nails from the coffin and they just left him in place there.

MZ: Ok, so in the past, we have talked a little bit, this is out of sequence I guess, about doing research on Native American remains from here. So, I know that a little bit of DNA work has been done on mound 72.

WI: They are trying but they haven't had much success yet because the preservation is very poor, but they are attempting to do some, yeah.

MZ: So, and in the strontium isotopes, now what do they have to go through to get permission to do that?

WI: Well now all the burials that were under mound 72 were the jurisdiction of the Illinois State Museum Collections and Research Center in Springfield where they are stored so they had to get permission from the Illinois State Museum. Now thus far there hasn't been an official claim by an Indian tribe ah under

what is called NAGPRA… Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act … ah although the Osage have sent a letter of intent that they ultimately will make some kind of claim not only to Cahokia but also to most of Illinois, Missouri and Ohio, Indiana and places along the Ohio River and places along the Mississippi River in the Midwest here where they migrated in the past but ah, we don't really know who their direct descendants are at this point, although the Osage are some of the best candidates because they have got a lot of some of the same kind of mythology and symbolism, complex social/political structure that reflects a more complex earlier time, their oral traditions talk about them talk about them in this general area at some time in the past, but we just don't know when; if was it at Cahokia was it in the beginning, the middle or the end, but they feel a direct connection to Cahokia and a lot of the archaeologists and anthropologists who are studying again cosmology and things like that, see similarities in the artifacts and the motifs that we see in the archaeology, very similar, almost identical to what we see in the Osage and their correlates, the Osage, the Pawqua, Quapaw, PawPaw, Omaha, and the Kansa were at one time one big group in the Ohio valley, that migrated westward in the and they kinds split and went different directions but they…

MZ: So, do you think the Mississippians have more connections to the east or to the south?

WI: More to the south, yeah, because there are Mississippian sites all throughout the southern states, as a far as materials coming to Cahokia, we get more looks like coming more from the south, and we have got things going from Cahokia look like they are going more northward to, say connections in both directions.

MZ: Mmm… okay, I would like to thank you for fitting me into your schedule and giving me so much time, I appreciate that. And giving us your insights into this site.

WI: Well, glad to do it and … glad to be able to contribute the oral history of Madison County.

MZ: OK, thank you.