The History of the Georgia Archaeological Site File (GASF)

By

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The Georgia Archaeological Site File (GASF) is the official repository for information about archaeological sites in Georgia. GASF was established in 1976, in compliance with a federal mandate (Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act) that centralizes information about historic properties and archaeological sites. Up until that time, three universities in Georgia-Georgia State University, University of West Georgia (formerly West Georgia College) and University of Georgia each maintained separate site files. The National Park Service in Macon, Georgia before it moved to Tallahassee even had its own site file. Another separate list of site numbers was Robert Wauchope's records. Lewis Larson's (state archaeologist at the time) objective was to combine the site forms from all of these, establish a working relationship with the state archaeology office, and to centralize the knowledge for easier research and maintenance. Larson decided that the state file should be situated at UGA for two primary reasons. First, UGA Laboratory of Archaeology and the Anthropology Department had had an active role in archaeology in Georgia since 1947, had the largest file box of site locations, and had the largest collection of Georgia artifacts. Second, the faculty dedicated to archaeology was composed of a young and energetic crew of PhD archaeologists: David Hally, Donald Graybill, Bruce Smith, and Paul Fish.

Before GASF officially began in 1976, the site file used by archaeologists at UGA was stored in a small metal file box of 5 by 7 cards and would travel from office to office depending on who would need to access the information. The origins of this box likely lay in the 1950s by Arthur Kelly and students. Upon receiving startup funds from DNR, and officially establishing one comprehensive state site file, a number of things occurred. First, UGA was able to give the site file its own room (now G35) in the basement of Baldwin Hall and hire one graduate student, Charles M. Baker to work with Don Graybill (first UGA archaeologist to use a computer-main frame) to set up a databases coding scheme for sites. This coding scheme involved recording data, in pencil, one line per site on large multicolumn sheets of paper. The data from the coding sheets were then typed onto punch cards (80 columns per site and 3 cards per site). The punch card machines were in the Sociology Department and the Site File would occasionally hire someone to "type" the data onto the punch cards. Once there was a box of 2000 or so newly punched data cards, students would then take them to the mainframe computer center in the basement of the science library to be put onto a standard 9-track tape. The tapes were curated at the computer center and a backup tape was kept in the Site File room in Baldwin Hall. Quad maps, essential to the site file were also purchased at this time. Later, Candy Quillian was hired to keep the site file open one afternoon a week and to begin transferring information from the cards to the quad maps and resolving the inevitable problems that came with having different site files and numbers. Every imaginable problem was present—the same site with many numbers, and many sites with the same number. By 1977, a new site form was designed and the old 5x7 cards were stapled to 8 ½ x 11 inch sheets, punched, and put on a large shelf in 159 large blue 3-ring binders categorized by county. After Candy left the site file around 1979, undergraduate Terri Smith inherited the job until 1981 when Mark Williams, then a graduate student, began

working there. David Hally managed the Site File account up to this point. Williams, upon arriving continued the work of going through county by county and fixing problems. By 1984, Williams was able to hire occasional work study students for the first time to assist in the site file, a tradition that continues today. An important advance took place about 1983, when Williams was able to purchase an IBM Personal Computer for the first time. The tape with all of the coded information from the punch cards had its information transferred to a floppy disk and put into Quattro Pro spreadsheet on the PC. About 1985 the site file moved to a new room (now G39) in Baldwin Hall. During this time, the site file continued to be funded through 1 year grants from DNR.

Historically, GASF has been operated by primarily undergraduate students under the guidance of the Director, Mark Williams. The Site File diligently coded data and curated the information on for years without really using the electronic data for anything. Users would come to the Site File (one afternoon a week) and simply look through the maps and folders. It was always hoped that in the future, this electronic information would be made into a useful tool for research. In the late 1980s the data was transferred in to Paradox database. By the mid-1990s it was transferred into Microsoft Access. The first use of GIS software for the Site File data was Atlas GIS, initially used around 1994.

Georgia's Natural, Archaeological, and Historic Resources GIS (GNAHRGIS) was established as a major data outlet between 2004-2005 as the result of money funneled by the Federal Department of Transportation to Georgia Department of Transportation and UGA's Information Technology Outreach Services (ITOS). Once developed, all Site File data were then coded, entered, and updated into GNAHRGIS every day as new data arrive to the Site File. There are numerous protocols in place that GASF personnel follow to ensure that site forms, maps, reports, and GNAHRGIS are accurate and current. GASF has evolved greatly over the years from the 5x7 cards that recorded site information to an integrated limited GIS program that contains information about Georgia's archaeological, natural, and historic resources and is currently in use.

GASF presently curates site forms for over 58,000 recorded archaeological sites with many new sites added each year. In addition, GASF houses over 8,000 Cultural Resource Management (CRM) reports. Further, there are over 2,000 scholarly manuscripts that detail information on the cultural heritage of Georgia. The Site File is in place so that CRM companies, government agencies, qualified individuals, and research organizations have archaeological information readily available for research, as well as Section 106 compliance review. Due to Georgia law (OCGA 50-18-72[a][10]) the specific information about location and contexts of archaeological resources are protected. Therefore, only those individuals with proper credentials can access site file information. The site file is open to professional archaeologists conducting research or engaging in Cultural Resource Management activities.