

Personal Statement
Rachel Thimmig

When I was a little girl, I spent my Saturday mornings watching documentaries on the History and Smithsonian Channels with my dad while other kids my age were watching cartoons. Growing up interested in cultural heritage and preservation has shaped my core values and led me to dedicate my life to the study of what I am passionate about: archaeology. I am currently completing my Bachelor of Science in Anthropology with a focus on archaeology at Southern Methodist University. In addition, I have complementary minors in History and Sociology. After finishing my undergraduate degrees, I plan to pursue my Master's and PhD in archaeology with the goal of entering the professional world and beginning my career as an archaeologist.

I am interested in studying how and why culture changes in the archaeological record during periods of culture contact and transition. Periods of in-between have previously been neglected by historians and social scientists, but I believe that the cultural adaptations and change that resulted from these tumultuous times remain in the archaeological record despite being very difficult to find. Furthermore, this time period is especially important because many of the consequences of the proto-historic are still with us today. Therefore, this field poses new research questions that need to be answered. Though there is no doubt that the entirety of North America needs to be analyzed during this crucial time, I am particularly interested in the North American Great Plains culture area because of gender roles and specialized craft production and decline during the proto-historic.

SMU has provided amazing opportunities that have given me the chance to do real archaeology and served as the source of my research interests. My first-ever archaeological field experience dealt with proto-historic Puebloan issues and included tribal collaboration. In the summer of 2018, I completed SMU's collaborative archaeological field school at Picuris Pueblo's convento near Taos, New Mexico. The convento was burned down by the Picuris in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 which expelled the Spanish successfully for 12 years. During the field school, we were able to work very closely with the tribe, and it has motivated me to give back by helping and working for Native American groups. This experience also motivated me to focus on the Native American side of the story using the archaeological record. Historical context and documentation are incredibly important, but they also skew the proto-historic opinion toward European domination, which is not always the case. Archaeological research during this time period can lead us on a more truthful and less biased past.

As for my work on Great Plains archaeology, Dr. Kacy L. Hollenback has been my main source of inspiration. She has taken me on as her undergraduate research assistant, so I have become very involved in her areas of study which include disaster archaeology in the Northern Plains as well as her work with the Hidatsa, Arikara, and Mandan tribes during Plains Village culture complexes. Part of the work that I do for her involves geoarchaeological analysis to look at the different uses of space after the transition from circular earth lodges to rectangular Anglo-inspired cabins. This is particularly important because the construction of earth lodges was always a sacred female task which took months to complete in accordance to certain steps. Lodges also had many ceremonial and ritual spatial designations, so switching from circle to

rectangle would have drastically changed the structure and layout of domestic life. No one has looked in-depth at Native American-built cabins from this time, let alone examined how devastating the change was to the religious practices and ceremonies of the Hidatsa, Arikara, and Mandan people. To study this cultural change, I have performed magnetic susceptibility and am still undertaking weak acid extractions on samples from a rectangular cabin at the Fort Clark State Historic Site and earth lodges at Sakakawea Village. In the summer of 2019 I will have the opportunity to conduct geophysical survey and excavation on the Sakakawea Village site as a volunteer with the Paleocultural Research Group who has been contracted by the National Parks Service. I will also be assisting Dr. Hollenback with her field work as well.

Additionally, I am beginning another research project for my senior distinction thesis that will involve ceramic analysis of firing behaviors. On Hidatsa pottery. The goal of this project is to understand if there was a decrease in quality firing behavior over time likely due to the rapid population decline and loss of knowledge after exposure to Old World epidemic diseases. Much like earth lodge construction, pottery was another sacred craft performed by women. The practice of making pottery was limited to a certain few, and a potential apprentice had to purchase the rites to learn from the master. Similarly, many crafts and rituals were only done by certain age and gender cohorts, so when the Northern Plains' population was devastated disease, sacred knowledge was forever lost after entire guilds of specialized craftsmen and women died. Step-wise clay oxidation analysis coupled with magnetic susceptibility will shed light on the changing Hidatsa world and the cultural genocide they experienced. This project continues my mission of conducting proto-historic artifact analysis with a focus on culture contact processes.