**Cowles House Passage**

<https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-3053/A000484.jpg> - Photograph of a watercolor painting of the Cowles House. Text on the back of the photograph: ‘Watercolour-1895. Belonged to Jessie Beal - Daughter of W.J. Beal. Received from Roger D. Baker, 303 Swift Ave., Durham North Carolina. Photo of painting July 31, 1970. Beal Lived Here - 38 years.’ Image courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections.

Cowles House is now MSU’s oldest standing building, it was constructed in 1857 as one of several homes built for the earliest faculty on Faculty Row. Cowles House was home to MAC’s earliest presidents, Williams and Abott, and also to the professors of Botany, such as William J. Beal and Ernst Bessey. It was also home to President Hannah, and, most recently, to President McPherson. Currently, it is used as a banquet hall. Since its construction, the building has been modified significantly; only a portion of the original building is still evident, and it is much larger than its original size (Brock 2009).[[1]](#footnote-1)

During these early decades, Cowles house was not only a place of residence, but was also a hub of campus entertainment. Early on, no organized social life existed on MSU’s campus. Students instead gravitated towards faculty homes, where faculty and staff would regularly host small get-togethers. The Abbots were known to invite students and guest into their home and students would come weekly to discuss literature and to read (Painter 2018).

At some point after 1915 Cowles House was repurposed to serve a more administrative function, a 1927 map lists it as “Secretary’s House”.

<https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-344/A003856.jpg> - Map showing MSU's campus as it would have appeared in 1927. Image courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections.

<https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-3052/A000483.jpg> - A view of Cowles House, ca. 1920.

In 1941 Cowles House again became the residence for the University President, then President Hannah and his family. The house was scheduled to be remodeled in 1941, but major reconstruction was postponed until the end of World War II. When the reconstruction were completed much of the building was rebuilt and a new wing was added to the west end (Kuhn 1955:402; Painter 2018).

<https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-1483/1941campusmap.jpg> - This is a hand drawn map of the Michigan State College campus in 1941. It was created as part of a National Youth Administration project. Image courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections.

Cowles House has been of great interest to Campus Archaeology due to its location within the Sacred Space. As little has changed in this part of campus, this area has the potential for preserving intact archaeological deposits from the earliest days of campus. CAP has conducted numerous surveys around the building, including in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2014, but we are yet to find any clear features or concentrations of materials. Instead, only a diffuse scatter of artifacts has been found around the building. Brick fragments, window glass, nails, and other construction debris are the most common objects found, while a few ceramic sherds, animal bones, bottle glass, and two golf balls have also been recovered. In general, this record is likely the result of construction and remodeling episodes, mixed in with trash from everyday life (Painter 2018). [[2]](#footnote-2)

<https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/image-12.png> - Artifacts from south of Cowles House, Shovel Test Pit G1

**Code:**

## (css: "color: #fffea8;")[Cowles House]

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<div class="column"><img src= "https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-3052/A000483.jpg" alt= "A view of Cowles House, ca. 1920." style="width:100%;">

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<div class="column"><img src= "https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-3051/A000478.jpg" alt= "A snow covered Cowles House. Text on the back of the photograph: 'Cowles House prior to reconstruction in late 1940s.' Image courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections." style="width:100%;">

<div class="center">A snow covered Cowles House. Text on the back of the photograph: 'Cowles House prior to reconstruction in late 1940s.' Image courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections.</div>

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### <div class="center">[[Home|HomePage]]</div>

### <div class="center">[[References|Other References]]</div>

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1. Brock, Terry 2009 &emsp; “Survey Spot: Cowles House”, //MSU Campus Archaeology Program//, *September 9, 2009.* <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=158> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Painter, Jeff 2019 &emsp; “The Many Faces of Cowles House, MSU’s Oldest Building”, //MSU Campus Archaeology Program//, *April 3, 2018* <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=5987> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)