Using archaeological remains and historical records CAP fellow Amy Michael and Josh Burbank explored the gendered landscape of MSU in the past. The defined a gendered landscape as a landscape that has discrete areas where accessibility is restricted by sex and/or gender.[[1]](#footnote-1) One of their goals was to see if it were possible to predict which spaces on campus were used and maintained specifically by women using archaeological material recovered during CAP excavations. Unfortunately, their investigation showed that identifying these areas at MSU would be extremely difficult since artifacts that may be associated with a gendered space are not necessarily recovered from those areas restricted to gendered use (Burbank 2015). In archaeology we call places where artifacts have been discarded away from their place of use \*\*secondary refuse contexts\*\* (Wilson 1994)[[2]](#footnote-2)

<https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/makeupbottles.jpg> - Five makeup containers found at Brody Complex, which served as the East Lansing dump from the 1920s to the 1950s.

Coming to this conclusion, the CAP fellows used archival evidence to identify [[Morrill Hall]] as one gendered space on the landscape. Morrill Hall not only functioned as the women’s dormitory, but was where female students in the late 19th and early 20th century would have had classes, meals, physical education, and spent most of their social and leisure time. Other gendered spaces identified in historical records were the World War II Victory Garden and green spaces along the Red Cedar River. Although artifact evidence from these areas is largely lacking, by continuing to identify gendered spaces on campus CAP archaeologists can use artifacts from a variety of places to gain an understating of the how women and men experienced MSU throughout its history.

<https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/victory-garden.jpg> - Women pose at the WWII Victory Garden, circa 1940s. Image courtesy MSU Archives and Historical Collections

<https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/162-565-6155/A003546_24a.jpg> - This photograph is in a scrapbook of pictures taken by international student Onn Mann Liang while he was at MSU between 1924 and 1926. In this image five young unidentified women sit on some rocks. Image courtesy MSU Archives and Historical Collections

In addition to locating these spaces, Michael and Burbank also wondered how the creation of female spaces in the early 20th century in areas previously reserved for male students affected the lives of and the interactions among students on campus. What were the reactions to these changing landscapes?

One resource used to answer these questions was the journals and scrapbooks of Irma Thompson, preserved in the MSU archives. Irma Thompson came to Michigan Agricultural College in 1897 when she was 16 years old and was in one of the first cohorts of women at MSU to live in Abbot Hall and to take the new [[Women’s Course|MSU Laboratories]]. CAP Fellow Amy Michael used Irma’s journals to learn about the experiences of students during a time when the college was becoming more accommodating to female students (Michael 2014b).

<https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Irma-Thompson-3.jpg> - Sketch from Irma Thompson’s journal reads ‘the old tree seat outside of College Hall’. Image Courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections – Irma Thompson Papers

Irma’s journals also give a detailes about of the Women’s program and how the College had to adjust their curriculum to fit their conception of “Women’s Education”. One entry describes the adjustment with regards to the manual labor students were required to perform:

“According to the formal curriculum all students at MAC were enrolled for at least two hours a week of what was called work. The Ags had to work on the farm. The Engineers had to dig ditches, build buildings, or repair old buildings. Since the work had to be educational rather than merely utilitarian the programming committee were at a loss for a work assignment for the coeds. Somebody suggested “household mechanics” so they sent us to the carpenter shop to learn how to use common tools. Our small group was greeted by the “mechanical engineers” with hoots of derision. The instructor Hogt accepted us with amused forbearance. \*\*For the girls it was a lark. The boys were helpful but unbearably “superior.” Our presence in their holy masculine domain was just an inconvenient joke….\*\* \*\*Nevertheless, I made a box with joined corners, a hinged lid with a clasp and when it was done I sanded, painted, and varnished it earning a cool 85 at the end of the course.\*\* Not long ago it went to my youngest grandson for a treasure chest.” (Michael 2014b; MSU Archives and Collections – Irma Thompson Papers)

Irma’s description of the carpenter’s shop as “their holy masculine domain” is both comical and insightful. Irma’s comedic side is also evident in her sketches of the classes she was talking as part of the Women’s Course.

<https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Irma-Thompson-2.jpg> - Sketch from Irma Thompson’s journal, facial expressions for each subject (notice botany). Image Courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections – Irma Thompson Papers

Through her journals and her drawings, we can see how Irma Thompson experienced M.A.C. and how she felt viewed by other students, particularly by male students. In another entry Irma writes: “I had struggled along in a man’s world… the only female students being Professors’ daughters and “specials” with influence on “Faculty Row” or the State Board of Agriculture. But in the fall of 1896 all that was changed. The gates were thrown wide to women students, preferably those who would enroll for a four-year period.” (Michael 2014b; MSU Archives and Collections – Irma Thompson Papers)

The sketch below illustrates her experience in “a man’s world” quite well. It shows a large group of men leaning in to stare at three women while other female students look on from the safety of Abbot Hall (Michael 2014a).

<https://i1.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/IMG_1669.jpg> - Drawing by Irma Thompson of students gathered in front of Abbott Hall (late 1890s). Image Courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections – Irma Thompson Papers

The College was changing, but for many years women were subject to heightened surveillance and restricted to certain spaces on campus. Rules prohibited them from leaving Morrill Hall at night without a male chaperone and restricted how often they could leave campus (Kuhn 1955:208; Michael 2014c). These restrictions would be relaxed in the 1920s due to the efforts of the Women's Student Council (Kuhn 1955:320-321), but M.A.C. and later MSU would remain a gendered landscape. It is interesting to think of the ways MSU is still gendered in many ways and what that means for current students at the University.

1. \*\*Burbank, Josh\*\* &emsp; “Identifying Gendered Space in MSU’s Past”, //MSU Campus Archaeology Program//, March 19, 2015. Accessed at: <a href= “<http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=3543>”> <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=3543></a> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. \*\*Wilson, Douglas C.\*\* 1994 “Identification and assessment of secondary refuse aggregates.” //J Archaeol Method Theory// 1, 41–68. Accessed at: <a href= “<https://doi-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1007/BF02229423>”> <https://doi-org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1007/BF02229423></a> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)