

Ramptown, a 19th-century Underground Railroad community in Cass County, Mich., first came to Michael's attention in 2001 when the State of

Michigan contacted him about the Michigan Freedom Trails Program. Local historians from nearby Vandalia, Mich., helped in the process. In 2003,

Michael and his team responded to a request by the Asylum Lake Policy and Management Council, a citizens group, to conduct an archaeological assessment

## Family Roots Inspire a Passion

**B**rendan Weaver is, like WMU's Prof. Michael Nassaney, an avowed public archaeologist who believes that archaeology "is about people, not potsherds (broken pottery fragments)." Brendan, 24, is an archaeology graduate student at WMU who does research in the Andes. He's also a lifelong resident of Kalamazoo.

"I'm fourth-generation, on my father's side," he says, "and both of my parents are from Kalamazoo. Wherever I go in the world, I carry that badge of Kalamazoo. It's a big part of who I am."

Brendan speaks proudly of Kalamazoo's arts, culture, and progressive politics. With his shoulder-length hair, sketchy beard, and angular features, he looks like a Left Bank poète maudit, or perhaps the mandolinist that he is.

Brendan is an only child. His father, John, grew up on a truck farm located near Markin Glen Park, one producing garden vegetables to sell in a local market. (The word "truck" derives from the French word "troquer," meaning "to barter.") John,

***Fourth generation Kalamazooan Brendan Weaver is making a career of studying past cultures. His mandolin travels with him when he ventures off on archaeological digs.***



Photo: Joni Weaver

who's now retired, worked for the Kalamazoo Gazette for 40 years as a circulation district manager. Brendan's mother, Joni McKinney, was raised by a single mother on the city's Eastside and worked 21 years at Kalamazoo Tank & Silo (KTS Industries) before it closed in 1994. She then became a travel agent and now works for Sea Land Air Travel in Paw Paw.

His mother's career as a travel agent has influenced Brendan's decision to study archaeology because it allowed the family to travel often and, through that travel, appreciate the arts as Brendan was growing up. Brendan's maternal grandmother, Kay McKinney, was also an influence by teaching him about nature and the importance of the imagination.

In the fifth grade, Brendan went with his parents and grandmother on a vacation to Meso-America (stops included Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras) to visit several Mayan ruins. "That really just fascinated me," Brendan said. "I learned that you could study the past indirectly through material culture." Then, in 2000, Brendan and Joni took a trip to the Peruvian Amazon.

Brendan's family still lives in the Evanston Avenue house where he grew up. He attended Kalamazoo Public Schools, including the Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center and originally thought he wanted to be a physicist. However, in his senior year, 2001–02, he took a WMU course, "Race, Biology, and Culture," which made him want to change his direction to anthropology.

"I consider myself a social activist," Brendan said, "and my academic work informs this." To emphasize this point, he talked of his past and current involvement with St. Thomas Moore Catholic Student

Parish, which has a sister parish in El Salvador that Brendan has visited. His recent social activism includes the living wage campaign, Latin American labor issues, and working with the WMU Teaching Assistants Union (AFL-CIO 1729). He has also been a substitute teacher (Spanish, English as a Second Language, and music) at Loy Norrix and Kalamazoo Central high schools and all three of Kalamazoo's middle schools.

Brendan participated in WMU's Archaeological Field School for three summers, 2003–2005, when he accompanied Dr. Frederick H. Smith — then a WMU faculty member — to Barbados in the Caribbean. "The excavations at Holetown, the first British settlement in Barbados, dating from 1627, raised really intriguing questions about what it means to be an American," said Brendan.

Brendan has developed an interest in "transitional processes, these cultural processes of social change," such as the ways European, indigenous New World, and African cultures have encountered and influenced each other. "I am trying," he said, "to understand my own ethnogenesis in Kalamazoo, and it's important to have a hemispheric perspective to do this."

By ethnogenesis Brendan means the way that a human group becomes ethnically distinct from other groups. The working title of Brendan's master's thesis is, "Ferro Ingenio in Porco, Bolivia: Historical Archaeology of Culture Contact, Labor, and Empire."

Brendan, who has played the piano since age 5, studied under Juanita Nash, now director of operations for The Gilmore here in Kalamazoo. He took up the mandolin five years ago, partly because it is portable for taking with him to archaeological

— including documentary background research and a walkover survey — at the site of the Colony Farm at Asylum Lake in Kalamazoo. This was an 1880s



Photo: Karl Watson

**In a 2005 excavation of a 17th–19th century colonial market in Bridgetown, Barbados, Brendan glances up from his work.**

digs. However, he quickly discovered that the instrument would replace the piano as his “musical voice.” While conducting research in Bolivia, he was introduced to the charango, a mandolin-like, 10-stringed instrument made with an armadillo shell.

In the American folk-rock tradition, he performs his own music and composes songs about Kalamazoo and “hemispheric understanding.” Brendan says that his music “has everything to do with historical anthropology — it’s another facet of my anthropological voice, another dimension of my public anthropology.” Both in Barbados and the Andes, Brendan has made a point of meeting local musicians and making music with them. He sings in English and Spanish.

Whereas Michael Nassaney is both philosophically and practically committed to doing archaeology in the continental United States, Brendan seeks to compare the cultures of peoples across the Americas. “I think it’s important to cross those boundaries” — separating nations and cultures — “when you’re able to.”

Brendan recently has been accepted into the highly competitive archaeology doctoral program at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., starting in the fall of 2008. There he will work with Dr. Steve Wernke, a historical archaeologist who works in Peru’s Colca Valley. 📷



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