The WMU archaeologists contacted private landowners in Cass County to obtain permission to survey their land. Communication with the landowners was crucial in order to coordinate the work of the archaeologists with the farmers’ planting schedules. Though hundreds of acres of planted crops could not be surveyed, archaeologists did survey a large area in Cass County.

After permissions were obtained, archaeologists walked the plowed fields west of Vandalia looking for evidence that would indicate where people had lived in the past. In total, approximately 760 acres of land were examined for material traces of activities that may have been associated with Ramptown.

Getting Permission

Western Michigan University (WMU) archaeologists Amanda Campbell and Michael Nassaney studied written records and old maps from the 1800s and talked to local residents to narrow down the location of Ramptown. One man remembered meeting Melissa Brown in the 1930s when she was at least 70 years old. She told him that she had been born at Ramptown. He also encountered architectural debris from the abandoned community while plowing nearby fields with a mule. Another elderly resident recalled that when she was a child, her mother told her about Ramptown. She had collected some artifacts from places where she thought Ramptown was located and shared these with the WMU archaeologists.

Finding Evidence of Ramptown

People often leave evidence of their activities in the form of artifacts such as broken pottery, tools, and glass, as well as features like fire pits, wells, privies, or other places of landscape modification. These indications suggest the locations where people lived and worked.

During their surveys, the archaeologists marked the places where they found artifacts on the surface of the soil. They noted the site locations and compared them to the written records, maps, and oral histories. Much to their surprise, none of the sites they found were shown on maps from the 1800s. This suggested that those places were associated with the undocumented cabins people occupied at Ramptown.