In this chapter, I examine a series of historical events that occurred during the Late Archaic Period (ca. 5600-3600 cal BP) at the Silver Glen Run complex in northeastern Florida. For this purpose, I, like many contemporary anthropologists, follow Sahlin's (1985:xiv) in defining an "event" not simply as a happening or occurrence but rather as a relation between a happening and a preexisting structure. According to this line of thought, happenings become historically significant (i.e., “eventful”) only as they are interpreted within a cultural framework. Further, whereas happenings occur constantly and usually with little or no lasting effect, events achieve a structural impact beyond the immediate context of their occurrence, an impact that is manifested in reinforced or reworked patterns of future practice. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the question of how exactly this transpires, how some seemingly discrete episodes become amplified so as to attain a more generalized cultural and historical significance, is what Sahlin's (1991:47) has referred to as the “fundamental enigma of the event.”

A recurring theoretical question with regard to events concerns the magnitude of change necessary for something to be judged “eventful” (see comments and response in Beck et al. 2007; Sahlin 1991:86). While few would question the eventfulness of Captain Cook’s famous encounter with native Hawaiians or the taking of the Bastille during the French Revolution, disagreement arises over whether the same historical import should be ascribed to everyday occurrences such as forming a pot, building a house, or preparing a meal. If viewed as environmentally or socially determined normative behaviors, these activities are decidedly uneventful because they simply recapitulate some larger unseen system. If, however, each practice is recognized as a historically contingent and socially negotiated process (sensu Pauketat 2001), then every act has at least the potential to incite eventful structural change. This is because everyday practices, as instantiations of structure, take place under constantly shifting social and material conditions. In these fluid circumstances, established structural relations are continuously put at “risk” as contradictions arise between cultural expectations and objective realities (Sahlin 1985). Every practice thus involves the potential for creative reinterpretation, an “inter-subjective moment” during which everyday actions can take on new forms and meanings in relation to novel conditions (Pauketat and Alt 2005:217; Sahlin 1985). Consequently, events, defined in terms of structural impact, need not be restricted to exceptional historical occurrences but also include the stuff of everyday experience.

Traditional archaeological accounts of the Archaic period in the Southeast have generally portrayed it as a period of relative continuity or stasis. Cultural change, where acknowledged at all, is most often portrayed as slow and gradual and is attributed to evolutionary rather than historical processes (Sassaman 2004, 2010, 2011a). A persistent focus on artifact typologies and functional analyses, combined with inadequate chronologies, have largely obscured Archaic
cultural variation and precluded the understanding of short-term, context-specific events and processes (Sassaman 2000:148). Recognizing historical events in the archaeological record requires getting beyond broad generalizations that characterize most Archaic studies and accessing variability in practice at a resolution commensurate with actual human experience (Sassaman 2010:13). Methodologically, one way to do this is to focus on features. As discrete sealed contexts, features offer a means of isolating individual practices to a degree that is usually unattainable within the complex palimpsests of general archaeological deposits. By directing attention toward the practical variability evident in features and relating it to changes in social and historical contexts at different scales, pivotal moments of social transformation can be recognized and understood (Pauketat and Alt 2005), even in the relatively distant past.

The events of primary concern here involved the digging and infilling of hundreds of extraordinarily large pits. While pits are generally treated by archaeologists as epitomizing the “non-event” due to their commonality and penchant for collecting everyday “garbage,” I hope to show that these particular features were far more than mere refuse containers. Instead, I suggest that through repeated, ritualized acts of pit digging and deposition, the Late Archaic inhabitants of Silver Glen Run orchestrated a series of material “interventions” (Sassaman 2011b), conscious and deliberate attempts to affect the course of history. By situating these micro-scale pit events within a genealogy of Archaic depositional practices, I argue that they played an active role in transforming the Silver Glen Run complex and establishing it as a place of regional significance where Late Archaic people gathered for purposes of remembrance and engagement with the past.

Events of Place

Perhaps predictably given its status as a historical concept, the notion of the event is most often invoked in relation to various aspects of time—chronology, duration, periodicity, and the like. In recent archaeological treatments, issues such as increasing temporal resolution (e.g., Gearey et al. 2009; Whittle et al. 2010), the relationship between short-term events and other timescales (e.g., Bintliff 2010; Gosden and Kirsanow 2006; Van Dyke 2008), and the distorting effects of temporal distance (e.g., Bailey 2007; Holdaway and Wandsnider 2008) have largely dominated discussion. However, given that events are as much spatial as temporal (Casey 1996:37; Sewell 2005:259), it is somewhat surprising that comparatively less explicit consideration has been paid to their dynamic relationship to place (cf. Beck et al. 2007).

People and place are mutually constituted through a historical process that Basso (1996) refers to as “interanimation.” In this view, places are not simply static backdrops for human action but rather are created and maintained through ongoing engagement between human and nonhuman actors in a given location (Barrett and Ko 2009; Ingold 1995; Tilley 2004). In other words, places are produced via social practice. Through various acts of place-making—from the building of a house to the planting of a garden—people continuously give shape and significance to the world around them. Over time, individual places acquire specific associations and meanings due to the social memories generated by the particular practices and events that have taken place there, as well as through their relationship to other related places in the landscape (Thomas 2001, 2008). At the same time, once created, places become active participants in processes of social reproduction and change. Much of the structuring power of places results from their durable materiality, as they are typically chock-full of the material residues of the past practices through which they were created and modified. As Barrett (1999:257) has argued, “each generation can be regarded as having to confront its own archaeology as the material
remains of its past piled up before it” (see also Gillespie 2008; Wallis 2008). These material remains encourage some practices and constrain others by facilitating particular interpretations, directing movement, and providing symbolic cues that demarcate appropriate forms of interaction (Barrett 1999, 2001; Richardson 1982). In this way, particular places and the broader landscapes into which they articulate constitute “systems of reference in which each human action that is performed is intelligible in the context of past and future acts” (Thomas 2001:174).

The notion of place (and materiality more generally) as both the outcome and medium of social action (Barrett 2001:153) offers archaeologists at least one (although certainly not the only) means of addressing Sahlins’s perceived “enigma.” Each material practice draws on (i.e., references) evidence of past practices and also contributes to the material conditions in which future ones will be conducted and interpreted (Pauketat and Alt 2005). Following from this, every act has at least the potential to be “eventful” to the extent that it is projected forward through time and (through its durable contribution to place) exerts a structuring influence that transcends the moment of its occurrence. Barrett (1999), in a frequently cited example from prehistoric Britain, effectively illustrates how micro-scale events can culminate in macro-scale structural transformation through their alteration of place-based systems of reference. During the Bronze Age a new mortuary tradition developed through a series of individual mortuary events that eventually resulted in large, layered burial mounds. According to Barrett, this layering facilitated a new linear conception of time that broke with earlier Neolithic ideas and ultimately triggered a far-reaching transformation in regional historical consciousness. Similarly, Gillespie (2008) describes how Complex A at the large Olmec site of La Venta was, over multiple generations, continually made and remade as an important civic-ceremonial center through a series of formalized depositional events highlighted by elaborate foundation caches. Through intertwined processes of place modification and memory-making, new categories of persons emerged at La Venta whereby society itself was repeatedly recreated. In both cases, individual micro-scale acts produced macro-scale outcomes due to their enduring material contributions to a particular place.

Deposition as Social Practice

As exemplified by the La Venta example, one of the most common cross-cultural strategies of place-making is the patterned deposition of particular substances and objects in various locations on the landscape. Traditionally, most of the materials deposited outside the purview of formal contexts such as burials or caches have been interpreted as “garbage” or “rubbish” and their deposition as a simple case of waste “disposal” (e.g., Needham and Spence 1997; Schiffer 1987). The archaeological value of such deposits has been most often evaluated in terms of their ability to inform on the original activities that produced them rather than any potential significance the depositional acts themselves may have held. Recently though, a growing number of archaeologists (Chapman 2000a, b; McNiven 2012; Pollard 2008; Thomas 1999) have critiqued the application of concepts such as rubbish in non-Western contexts. Chapman (2000b) points out that the term betrays two culturally-specific, ideological assumptions, neither of which should be uncritically applied to prehistoric contexts: 1) that rubbish constitutes something that was once active and dynamic but is now “dead” and of no more use, and 2) that because of its inefffectual position within society, rubbish should be separated from processes of the living.
An extensive literature now exists arguing that deposition is not merely reflective of social practice but in fact is social practice, worthy of study in its own right (e.g., McNiven 2012; Mills and Walker 2008; Pollard 2001; Thomas 1999). As Pollard (2001, 2008) has argued, all deposition, even routinized non-discursive forms, is structured to the extent that it is conducted according to a particular cultural sensibility or “aesthetic” judgment regarding what is appropriate in different contexts. This aesthetic can be expected to permeate virtually every decision affecting depositional practice, including the types, qualities, and arrangements of buried materials, the location and temporality of their emplacement, and the bodily dispositions of those participating (Pollard 2001:318). However, while all cultural deposits are important loci of social negotiation, deposition is at least occasionally used as a very conscious and deliberate strategy for making material statements about the world, often regarding the history and identity of places or the nature of social and political relations (Randall 2011). Late Prehistoric Araucanians of southern Chile, for example, constructed mounds during elaborate mortuary ceremonies whose layered soils were intended to represent and maintain the continuity of relations between the living and the dead (Dillehay 2007:166). Likewise, the mixing of human bone and various objects in the ditches at the Neolithic Etton enclosure was a conscious strategy used to forge a sense of community among otherwise dispersed groups (Pollard 2008:58). As Pollard (2008:44) suggests, “one could think of deposition as embodying a continuum of practices, some routinized and largely unconsidered, others overt performances.”

Far from passive and lifeless products of waste disposal, then, deposited materials have repeatedly been shown to actively participate in social life in a number of ways, including evoking memories related to specific events and places (Dawdy 2006; Jordan 2003), setting precedents for future practices (Moore 1986; Thomas 1999), and creating or reinforcing social relationships (Cameron 2002; Chapman 2000c; Gillespie 2008). The agencies exerted by deposited materials derive from a variety of sources, beginning with the highly social and performative nature of many depositional events, which gathered together diverse combinations of people and materials at important times and places, generating shared experiences and cultivating particular social memories. This contributes to what (Bell 1992) argues to be one of the primary effects of ritualized action in general, the production of agents oriented in a particular way (see also Joyce 2008). Agentive power also sometimes emanates from objects themselves, particularly those whose origins, histories, or material characteristics provide them with “inalienable” qualities and render them capable of “presencing” distant people, places, and events and creating enduring material relationships through processes of “enchainment” (Chapman 2000c; Pollard 2008; Weiner 1992).

Quite often, however, depositional potency derives less from the inherent power of particular objects and substances and more from the relations created by their combination and arrangement in a specific context. In this respect, many cultural deposits have a great deal in common with ceremonial bundles, perhaps best known among indigenous North Americans but made and used by societies worldwide (Zedeño 2008:363). Bundles are composed of two or more items (each of which often refers to a specific person or event) that are held together by some sort of wrapping. The objects contained within bundles interact with each other in powerful and diverse ways depending on the specific social and historical circumstances of their joining. According to Zedeño (2008:364), “while an object has its own properties and realms of interaction, when two or more objects are combined, their interactive capabilities integrate to become a new object—the bundle—that is more than the sum of its parts.” The same can be said of many materials deposited in the earth. While they all have their own predepositional
means and associations, once combined with other materials in a given location, those initial meanings may be transformed or even overridden completely by the power of the assemblage (i.e., bundle) as a whole (Pollard 2001:330; Stahl 2008:171). Thus, diverse depositional practices that have all too frequently been glossed as simple acts of refuse disposal might, at least in some instances, be more accurately described as processes of refuse transposal. Transposal, in this sense, refers to the propensity for some forms of deposition to affect the symbolic recontextualization of an object or set of objects from one category of meaning to another. So, while a Neolithic pot or stone tool may have initially been valued primarily in terms of its practical use, once it was broken and deposited within a ditched enclosure alongside other tools, pots, and human bone, it was transformed into a symbol of community cohesion (Pollard 2008).

A Brief Genealogy of Archaic Shell Deposition at the Silver Glen Run Complex

Pits and other depositional contexts that preserve evidence of individual practices are amenable to eventful analysis via what has been termed a “genealogical” approach (Pauketat and Alt 2005; Thomas 1999). Methodologically, this essentially involves documenting variability in a particular practice or institution across space and through time, thus forming a “genealogy of practice” that can then be compared to other genealogies at different scales. By linking individual acts together, these genealogies provide a sound basis for recognizing historical developments such as intensification or ritualization in relation to broader patterns of historical practice (Stahl 2008:185). According to Harding (2005:98), over time it may even be possible to trace these developments back to a specific “event” or “tear in history” which acted as their initial catalyst.

One of the defining characteristics of Middle and Late Archaic societies in the St. Johns River Valley of northeastern Florida is the widespread practice of depositing shellfish (primarily freshwater gastropod and bivalve) remains at various points on the landscape. This practice began with the advent of large-scale shellfishing in the region by at least 7300 cal B.P. and continued in one form or another for the next six-seven millennia. During the preceramic Mount Taylor period (ca. 7300-4600 cal BP) hundreds of shell matrix places were constructed of various configurations and scales, including dozens of large-scale mounds and ridges (Randall 2010; Sassaman and Randall 2012). Some of these accumulated gradually through repeated acts of habitation in the same location, while others were constructed rapidly and served as grandiose monuments and/or mortuaries. Randall (2010, 2011) and Sassaman (2010) have argued that by constructing monuments out of shell and other materials such as sand and swamp muck, Mount Taylor people inscribed various histories onto the landscape that could be revisited, commemorated, and augmented on important occasions. Shell, during this time, acted as a versatile and powerful substance that cut across many different spheres of meaning, being used variously as a staple food, building material, burial medium, and material mnemonic.

While shell deposition continued through Orange times (ca. 4600-3600 cal BP), this period witnessed a massive regional-scale reorganization of depositional practices in which active shell-mounding was halted at all but a few (perhaps as little as four) previously existing Mount Taylor sites (Figure 1) (Randall and Sassaman 2010). In at least three of these locations, Orange Period people enlarged and added onto existing Mt. Taylor mortuary mounds, forming massive, multi-lobed shell constructions. This shift in landscape use corresponded with a number of other significant cultural developments including the appearance of area’s first
ceramic technology, a marked reduction in nonlocal objects, and changes in both settlement and mortuary practices.

All of these developments are clearly manifest at the Silver Glen Run complex (Figure 2), the northernmost of the known Orange Period mound centers in the middle St. Johns River valley. The complex is located along a spring run that drains into the west side of Lake George, an expanded segment of the river that forms the second largest body of water in Florida. The complex consists of an elaborate array of shell-free and shell-bearing features including shell mounds, ridges, and sheet middens that span the Middle and Late Archaic, as well as later periods (Randall et al. 2011; Sassaman et al. 2011). The earliest large-scale shell deposition occurred there during the middle part of the preceramic Mount Taylor period (ca. 6300-5750 cal BP) along the southern margin of the spring run (Locus A at 8LA1W). The substantial cultural deposits at Locus A appear to have resulted from the repeated construction and inhabitation of small house mounds that, over time, began to overlap and accumulate in a tell-like fashion, eventually forming an expansive shell ridge measuring approximately 200 m long and three to four meters high (Sassaman and Randall 2011). A similar ridge (8LA4242) was recently discovered directly across the spring run (8LA4242) from Locus A (Randall et al. 2011). The complex’s subsequent Late Archaic inhabitation included the construction of two massive mounds that Wyman (1875:38) refers to as “the most gigantic deposits of shell met with on the waters of the St. Johns.” According to Wyman, the larger of the two mounds (8LA1E) was located at the mouth of the spring run and formed an enormous U-shaped enclosure measuring roughly 300 m in length and approximately six to eight meters tall at its highest point. He describes the other mound (8MR123) as an “amphitheater of shell” surrounding the boil of the spring. Both mounds began as preceramic mortuaries that were subsequently expanded and built up by the subsequent Orange period occupants of the site. Although both features were severely affected by early 20th-century shell mining, recent archaeological testing of intact remnants largely supports Wyman’s descriptions (Randall et al. 2011; Sassaman 2011c).

The only Late Archaic deposits unaffected by shell mining occur within two relatively low-lying shell nodes (designated Locus B and Locus C) less than a kilometer to the southwest of the 8LA1E shell mound (Gilmore 2011). Locus B, the focus of this chapter, consists of a slightly curvilinear shell node that opens toward the spring run and rises only about a meter above the surrounding landscape at its highest point. The well-preserved stratified deposits at Locus B (Figure 3) reveal a dynamic depositional history and constantly shifting relationship to the broader landscape. Locus B was initially utilized during the late preceramic period as the site of a small-scale, intermittent settlement. The deposits making up this component include at least four stacked living surfaces lined with thin layers of bivalve shell mixed with occasional vertebrate fauna and a variety of tools and debitage made of stone, bone, and marine shell. A number of small pits were dug down from these surfaces and infilled with similar materials. The broad variety and relatively high frequency of artifacts and features suggest a domestic, residential use of Locus B during this interval.

Coincident with the appearance of Orange pottery in this location (ca. 4300 cal BP), Locus B was transformed into a specialized shellfish processing locality replete with scores of massive, overlapping pits. These pits are mostly distributed across an approximate 700 m² area just off the western edge of Locus B’s shell node, although isolated examples have also been uncovered farther to the east and west. They are, for the most part, densely packed and frequently overlap, many apparently having been dug one on top of another. The scale of these features dwarfs anything found either before or after in the complex’s 6000+ years of prehistoric
occupation. Most examples measure between 70 and 120 cm in diameter and many exceed 1 m in depth. The largest is well over 2 m wide and more than a meter deep, exhibiting an estimated volume of over 2.5 m$^3$. Pit shape varies considerably, ranging from broad, deep basins to narrow, straight-sided shafts.

Fill in the Locus B pits varies widely. Several of the pits have lenses of bright orange oxidized sand, charcoal, and concreted whole mussel shell lining their bottoms, suggesting that at least some of them were used for roasting shellfish. None contain a substantial quantity of either vertebrate fauna or artifacts, save for modest amounts of fragmented and undecorated Orange fiber-tempered pottery. While all of the pits contain some quantity of shell, the frequency, composition, condition (i.e., the degree of crushing, burning, and weathering), and structure of shell deposits is quite variable. Some are filled primarily with sand and contain only a trace of shell, while others appear to have been infilled in one massive depositional episode. The most striking features, however, are those containing layer after layer of shell of different types and conditions, indicative of a series of discrete depositional acts. Deposition into one large pit (Feature 38), for example, began with a thick layer of dense whole banded mystery snail (*Viviparus georgianus*) that over time became concreted. A 20-cm thick layer of crushed and burned mussel shell was then deposited before the pit was finally topped off with sand and another layer of whole and crushed mystery snail. In another example (Feature 104), infilling began with the deposition of a 20-cm layer of mixed shell (including apple snail [*Pomacea*], mystery snail, and bivalve) followed by a layer of unusually large whole apple snails. A thin lens of mostly shell-free sand was then either emplaced or simply allowed to accumulate in the still-open feature. Subsequently, another layer of whole apple snail was laid down, followed directly by a layer of whole paired and unopened mussel shell. On top of the mussels was a thin stratum of very dark, almost black, organically-enriched sand, and finally, a layer of lighter brown sand. While virtually every pit contains a unique fill sequence, the constituents of individual layers are replicated across pits, suggesting that they were combined according to particular “recipes” or “grammars” in different locations.

Shortly following the cessation of large-scale pit digging (ca. 3900 cal BP), a large quantity of mostly whole *Viviparus* shell was deposited across the surface of Locus B, an event marking another major transition in the site’s history. This “shell cap” forms a 30-50 cm thick, mostly homogeneous stratum of unconsolidated shell that in many places contains little if any soil matrix. Like the pits below it, this stratum contains only very sparse vertebrate fauna and artifacts, notably a small amount of fiber-tempered pottery. In contrast to the undecorated pottery from the pits, however, many of the sherds recovered from this deposit exhibit the curvilinear incisions and punctuations typical of a relatively rare variety of Orange pottery called Tick Island Incised (Bullen 1972). The overall undifferentiated nature of the shell, the lack of evidence for trampling, and the paucity of vertebrate fauna all indicate that this layer of shell was assembled relatively rapidly, probably in the course of one or a few large-scale depositional acts. Importantly, the shell cap is virtually coextensive with the pits underlying it and in some places appears to have infilled open pits, in effect turning what must have been a pocked, uneven surface into a relatively flat and smooth one. This mantle of shell is not unlike the ones that have been found to cover discontinued Mt. Taylor habitation sites (Randall 2010; Sassaman 2010) and perhaps constitutes the renewal of a long-lived tradition of ritually marking transitions in the use of a place by capping it with clean, whole shell.

Locus B Pits as Historical Events
Unfortunately, because they are ubiquitous in many regions and may appear largely interchangeable upon cursory examination, pit features are, more often than not, lumped together and given little weight in archaeological interpretations. Pit fill, in particular, which is generally assumed to be unrelated to a feature’s primary function, is prone to being dismissed as mere secondary refuse, a result of casual discard into a convenient receptacle. As Chapman (2000a:61) has noted, the “humble pit” represents a class of feature that has been “much maligned, ignored, or otherwise maltreated” in many archaeological narratives.

With regard to Locus B, the tendency to undervalue pit deposits is exacerbated by a general reluctance on the part of many regional archaeologists to attribute a cultural significance to shellfish beyond their status as an abundant subsistence resource (e.g., Crothers and Bernbeck 2004; Marquardt 2010a, b; Trinkley 1985). Although Archaic sites with large piles of earth (e.g., Saunders 1994) are readily accepted as purposefully constructed early monuments, mounded deposits of shell, because they are assumed to be composed largely of food remains, are often regarded as incidental, gradual accumulations of domestic garbage. Based on this firmly entrenched perspective, pit deposits such as those uncovered at Locus B are unlikely to be investigated for any purpose beyond the simple reconstruction of Late Archaic dietary habits. In contrast, I argue that acts of pit digging and deposition represented more than the mindless repetition of subsistence-related behaviors, conducted in the same way independent of context. Instead, like all social practices, they reflect the historically conditioned decisions of knowledgeable and intentional actors occupying particular material and social settings (Pauketat and Alt 2005). As such, it should come as little surprise that, at least occasionally, pit-related practices constituted important historical events with substantial roles in processes of cultural categorization and meaning production.

Multiple attributes of Locus B pits suggest that they held significance beyond their practical utility as first, shell roasting facilities and subsequently, refuse containers. First, and most obvious, is their size. While several contemporary shell matrix sites in the broader region include shell-filled pits (e.g., Janus Research 1995; Saunders 2004; Trinkley 1985), the extraordinary size and frequency of those at Locus B sets them apart from other documented feature assemblages. The sheer scale of digging and shellfish processing suggested by the pits seems out of proportion with the everyday subsistence requirements of small kin-based hunter-gatherer groups occupying a diverse and productive environment. With no evidence suggesting, and presumably little need for, long-term storage at the site, an alternative possibility is that the pits were geared toward the rapid production of great amounts of food, perhaps for consumption at the periodic large-scale gatherings hypothesized to have taken place at the nearby shell mounds (i.e., 8LA1E and 8MR123). Indirect support for such a scenario is provided by the fact that many of the Locus B pits cut into pre-existing ones, indicating repeated pulses of intense activity rather than a lengthy period of continuous occupation.

The content of the pits also suggests a meaning beyond the purely mundane. Unlike some earlier instances of ritualized deposition in the same region (e.g., Endonino 2008; Wheeler et al. 2000), the Locus B pits are not marked by an abundance of unusual or exotic objects, save for one modified deer mandible that was likely part of a mask and a few marine shell disk beads found scattered across multiple features. They are instead distinguished more by a paucity of many material frequently found within general midden deposits throughout the region (e.g., Russo et al. 1992; Sassaman 2003; Sassaman and Randall 2011), including vertebrate fauna,
lithic/marine shell tools and debitage, and paleofeces. If the pits were infilled through casual 
acts of refuse disposal, one would expect those materials to form major constituents.

As noted above, the bulk of the pit deposits is composed of shell that varies considerably 
in terms of both size and condition and was combined in a unique manner in every pit, often 
resulting in elaborate stratified fill sequences. At a roughly coeval site in South Carolina, 
Trinkley (1985) interpreted similarly layered (although substantially smaller) pits as containing 
the remains of successive meal dumps. In his scenario, the pits were used repeatedly for roasting 
shellfish that were removed, consumed, and disposed of back into the pits before the next batch 
was processed. Presumably, this sequence was repeated until the pits were topped off and 
another had to be dug. At least three factors render this interpretation inadequate for explaining 
the layered pit fills at Locus B. First, evidence for roasting (heat-oxidized sand, burned shell, 
large charcoal lumps), where it exists, occurs in only a single layer lining the bottoms of pits. 
Based on Trinkley’s hypothesis, one would expect a layer of thermal alteration between every 
individual shell stratum. Second, three of the excavated pits at Locus B contained strata 
composed of whole, unopened, and unburned bivalve shells indicating that they were neither 
cooked nor consumed. And finally, pit deposition at Locus B appears to have taken place rapidly 
with very little time elapsing between the deposition of the first layer and the last. Almost all of 
the shell layers within the pits sit directly on top of one another with no intervening sediment 
accumulation or soil formation. Moreover, none of the more than two dozen massive pit features 
either excavated or encountered in profiles at Locus B show any evidence of having collapsed in 
on themselves. Based on first-hand experience excavating test units into the site’s soft 
unconsolidated sand, if left open, pits would have been subject to structural failure during the 
first substantial rainfall. The fact that not a single excavated example did fail suggests that they 
were infilled almost immediately, not over a period of several days as implied in the “meal-
dump” scenario.

An interpretation more consistent with the archaeological evidence is that the pits were 
infilled soon after having been dug, perhaps as part of a single continuous depositional process 
involving a variety of materials selected from a number of different sources. The short period of 
time indicated between pit-digging and pit-filling at first seems at odds with the highly 
weathered condition of the shell composing some pit deposits (see Becket and MacGregor 
2012:58-59 for a similar observation). In addition, the diverse combinations of shellfish species, 
along with frequent disparities in the extent of weathering, burning, and crushing between layers 
in the same pit, make it unlikely that all of the shell in the pits underwent the same process of 
collection, roasting, and consumption prior to immediate deposition. It instead points to a 
diverse array of predepositional taphonomic histories in which some materials were deposited 
soon after harvesting, some after they were processed and consumed, and still others only after 
they had been left out in the elements for some length of time. The fact that materials with such 
diverse histories ended up in the same features negates the likelihood of casual discard and 
instead suggests that they were intentionally selected for a particular purpose and combined in 
meaningful ways. It is possible that individual shells composing the pit deposits layers derived 
from specific important events such as feasts or other communal ceremonies and had to be dealt 
with in a particular manner (Walker 1995). These residues may have been stockpiled for some 
period of time before their inclusion in a pit. If so, then the layered pits may have served as 
“bundled” histories, used for linking particular events together and ordering them to form 
complex historical narratives. Like all bundles, it was not so much the inherent value of the
substances themselves (in this case individual shell deposits), but rather the symbolic transposal achieved via their combination that made them meaningful.

In effect, these deposits constituted inverted, subterranean shell mounds, homologous to the countless above-ground monuments that marked and structured the Late Archaic landscape. However, unlike above-ground mounds, which rely on being seen and interacted with for much of their effect, the underground “mounds” at Locus B are completely obscured even as they are constructed. One might question what the point is of building a subterranean monument that no one will ever see. Part of the answer to this question may be provided by Kuchler (1999) and others (e.g., Gillespie 2008; Hendon 2010:113; Mills 2008) who have argued somewhat paradoxically that the memory of an event can be heightened or reinforced through symbolic acts of forgetting, which include the destruction or concealment of associated objects. Based on this idea, the deposition and burial of residues from important occurrences such as feasts or other ceremonies may have functioned to memorialize these events, as well as the places where they transpired. This is the basic idea used by Thomas (1999:72; 2000:80) to explain the common Neolithic practice of siting monuments atop assemblages of old infilled pits, some of which had been dug generations earlier. However, in this case, while the burial of shell deposits may well have enhanced particular memories, the distributional data show that many of the Locus B deposits were in fact re-exposed and viewed as new pits were dug that intercut old ones. These would have been encountered by Late Archaic people in much the same way that they are by modern archaeologists—in profile, with the entire sequence of deposits made visible and begging for interpretation. Far from ancillary, it is this aspect of the Locus B pits that I argue holds the key to understanding their “eventfulness.”

As already discussed, the features in question were sited in a location that had been used previously by preceramic people as a small-scale settlement. The first Orange Period pits excavated at Locus B would have intersected deposits from this earlier occupation (see Figure 4), granting their diggers access to a relatively distant past and perhaps adding another layer of meaning to the massive-scale roasting activities taking place there. As this practice was repeated through time, Orange pits also began to intersect each other, exposing material reminders of more recent people and occurrences. Eventually, as these features covered the site, the encountering of old infilled pits must have become the expected outcome of, and probably even added motivation for, continued digging. The cumulative effects of these repeated material engagements can be seen by examining changes in pit deposition practices through time. Although only seven of the pits have associated radiocarbon assays, when examined in chronological order, a pattern emerges showing increasing depositional complexity through time (See Figure 5). While the earliest pits appear to have been filled in one or a few distinct episodes, the later ones (e.g., Features 38 and 104) exhibit more elaborate sequences of shell and earth. In addition, a majority of the pits with the most complex layered fills exhibit no basal oxidation or any other evidence that they were ever used for roasting.

It is possible that as time elapsed and old pits were uncovered with growing frequency, pit deposition became an increasingly deliberate effort to write a particular history into the Locus B landscape, with the knowledge that it would eventually be uncovered by subsequent digging. By the final stages of large scale pit digging at the site, a number of pits were most likely dug for the explicit purpose of receiving shell deposits. At this point, pits were no longer just a means of memorializing other events such as the mounding and feasting ceremonies. They instead became important events in their own right, gaining influence by drawing on the traditions of an already well-established shell mound tradition, but altering them in important and perhaps strategic
ways. Unlike their above-ground counterparts, which were susceptible to being observed and experienced by anyone within a certain distance of them, the buried mounds at Locus B would have allowed the site’s Orange Period inhabitants to regulate the timing and circumstances of their opening, possibly in ways that heightened their impact. Like more traditional monuments, while relying on the authority of the past, the Locus B pit deposits were oriented primarily toward achieving a particular future by preconfiguring a future point of reference into the landscape. Depositional practices, in this context, were part of a deliberate strategy, or “intervention” (Sassaman 2011b), geared toward the production of future memories (cf. Eves 1996).

Pit Events and the “Making” of the Silver Glen Run Complex

By fixing a meaningful set of objects at a particular spot on the landscape, pit deposition was a particularly effective means of establishing the identity of a place and durably linking it to specific kinds of activities or events (Thomas 1999, 2000). As discussed above, the pit events at Locus B involved interaction with the past as earlier materials were repeatedly exposed and new depositional narratives were inscribed into the ground. Here, I argue that these practices not only established the Silver Glen Run Complex as a new kind of place, but also implicated the site in broader transformational processes.

As already alluded to, the beginning of the Orange period was marked by a number of regional-scale changes in material practice. Many of these developments are linked to an apparent shift in historical consciousness from Mount Taylor times when past and present existed side-by-side to the Orange Period when, for the most part, the past was kept at a distance from everyday life. Mt. Taylor people had a long tradition of burying the dead in shell or sand mounds near settlements. However, there is no evidence that this practice continued into the Orange Period. In fact, virtually no Orange Period burials have been encountered in the Middle St. Johns Valley (in either domestic or ceremonial contexts), suggesting that whatever Orange people did with their dead, it involved separating their remains from contexts of everyday living. In addition, whereas Mt. Taylor people repeatedly settled in the same locations, constructing conspicuous material histories in the form of tell-like mounds of debris (e.g., Silver Glen Run’s Locus A), the few known Orange settlements in this area appear scattered and relatively ephemeral. And although Orange components are sometimes found within a few tens of meters of Mt. Taylor mounds, the mounds themselves appear to have been actively avoided in all but a few known cases, one of those of course being the Silver Glen Run complex (Randall 2010). Thus, in direct contrast to Orange settlements, where the past was intentionally avoided, practices in these specialized ceremonial locations seem to have been geared explicitly toward accessing and drawing on the past as a potentially powerful social resource.

Pit digging and shell deposition at Locus B must have played an integral role in these history-making efforts. By gathering diverse materials and holding them together in particular configurations, pits, in many respects, constitute depositional bundles par excellence. As Thomas (2012:5) notes, “the filled pit is a stable context within which a series of biographies terminate and are ‘bundled together.’” However, unlike traditional portable bundles that gain power by changing hands and moving between places, pits are fixed in space but circulate through time as they are excavated through layer after layer of past deposits. Cross-culturally, digging into the earth is thought to have involved the transgression of an important boundary between the past and the present or between this world and another (e.g., Chapman 2000a;
Darvill 2012; Davies and Robb 2004; Knight 1989; Kunen et al. 2002; Pauketat 2008). Rather than a neutral form of refuse disposal, then, pit deposition at Locus B may have constituted a quite literal “exchange with the ancestors” as old materials were removed and new ones put in their place (Chapman 2000a:64). The symbolic and material potency of these exchanges rapidly transformed Locus B from a place of residence to one of large-scale ritualized processing and finally to a place of discursive historical production. The durability of the pits’ influence can be seen in a subsequent place-altering event, the capping of Locus B in shell. This constituted yet another material intervention in Locus B’s dynamic Late Archaic history, one that perhaps memorialized the pits while at the same time offering an opportunity to start anew.

At a larger scale, in concert with the piling of shell at the sites of Mount Taylor burials, the pits helped to redefine the entire Silver Glen Run complex as a place of remembering for Orange people, a place where the past could be accessed and employed as a social resource in the present. Feasts and mounding rituals at Silver Glen Run were likely attended by relatively large groups of culturally distinct people from different areas. Consequently, acts of digging and shell deposition, especially at the scale witnessed at Locus B, would have incorporated into the bodily memories of geographically and socially diverse participants, at the same time they were durably inscribed into the Silver Glen Run landscape (sensu Connerton 1989). As a result, the Locus B pits not only affected the material conditions in which future pit practices were conducted in this particular location but also would have transcended the local by interjecting and cementing Silver Glen Run, as a specific kind of place, into the broader social memories of peoples subsequently dispersed throughout the region.

Conclusion

The study of historic events, whether by historians or archaeologists, is too often restricted to rare, exceptional incidents such as colonial encounters, battles, and large-scale natural disasters. While unquestionably producing important and far-reaching historical consequences, preoccupation with such occurrences largely obscures the potential eventfulness of more regular, seemingly mundane practices. I have argued here that one significant way that discrete, micro-scale occurrences can achieve macro-scale effects is through the material modification of place. By creating and altering the material contexts through which people go about their lives, even the most routine activities have the potential to transcend the moment of their execution and shape future patterns of practice. Moreover, participation in these place-altering activities produces enduring social memories that may extend far beyond a single location. By adopting a genealogical approach and linking related acts together through time, it is possible (and I would argue worthwhile) for archaeologists to identify and interpret the processes through which everyday practices were elevated to the status of historical events.

In this chapter, I focused on the historical developments spurred by a series of pit-related practices that occurred during the Late Archaic Period at the Silver Glen Run complex. From an ecofunctionalist perspective such as those that have largely dominated Archaic hunter-gatherer research, the shell-filled pits at Locus B are likely to be interpreted as resource-extraction tools, simple shellfish roasting facilities that were filled with garbage after falling out of use. However, while examination of these pits collectively may lead to the conclusion that they are relatively unremarkable save for their size, considering them individually within the historical context of their execution reveals their cultural importance. Within a historical narrative of Silver Glen Run, each pit can be considered eventful because every act of digging altered the
material conditions under which subsequent homologous acts were be conducted and interpreted. As a result, practices related to pit digging and shell deposition were transformed, as were the structures according to which their meanings were established. In this way, each small-scale pit event was not only structured by, but also contributed to the broad-scale historical processes through which the Silver Glen Run complex came to be inhabited as a place of remembrance and ritual. While it is still unclear what ultimately triggered these processes at a regional scale, be it an in-migration of nonlocal peoples, a sudden climactic change, or a far-reaching social movement, by studying social practices at a local scale, we can at least begin to understand the events through which these processes were actually experienced and sustained.

Obviously pit digging and deposition was but one of many strategies used by Archaic hunter-gatherers in the creation of place and the production of meaning. Additional examples include monument construction, extra-local exchange, technostylistic practices, and undoubtedly a whole host of others that have yet to be considered. By ratcheting down the sale at which we examine Archaic histories and focusing on the individual events of which they are composed, it is possible to avoid the “disturbing anonymity” (Sassaman 2000:148) characteristic of many archaeological accounts of “prehistory” and attain a better understanding of the past as it was actually experienced.
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Figure 1. Major Orange Period mound sites in the Middle St. Johns River Valley.
Figure 2. Map of the Silver Glen Run complex showing the reconstructed Late Archaic topography of site 8LA1 and estimated outlines of the shell mounds at sites 8MR123 and 8LA4242. (Topography reconstructions courtesy of Asa R. Randall.)

Figure 3. Schematic showing the Late Archaic depositional sequence at Silver Glen Run’s Locus B.
Figure 4. Test unit profile (2 m in width) from Silver Glen Run’s Locus B showing a large Orange Period pit (Feature 73) cutting through preexisting Mount Taylor domestic deposits.
Figure 5. Chronologically ordered, cross-sectional profiles of radiocarbon-dated Orange Period pits from Silver Glen Run’s Locus B.