

# The Records of Archaeology

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Two related issues are involved in preserving the archaeological record. One is the preservation of the database of archaeology: field notes, maps, photographs, drawings, sketches, artifact and field records, special reports, and analyses — the written, visual, tactile, and graphic data that together with artifacts and ecofacts constitute the archaeological database. Included also in this base are the results of analyses, in both published and manuscript or report form. Retention and access to these materials are problems for all of archaeology, but especially so for cultural resource management, an area of archaeology that faces many of the same problems as does applied anthropology (as described in John van Willigen's paper in this volume).

The second issue is the preservation of materials documenting the intellectual history of archaeology: biographical data, administrative records, unpublished materials, the "gray literature," and other documents relating to the work of individual archaeologists, projects, field schools, institutions, and organizations in both public and private sectors. Scholars engaged in research on the history of archaeology have long been aware of the often deplorable conditions in which these records are found and stored. All too often researchers find records in individual and institutional hands that are physically degrading and becoming scattered due to the lack of proper storage facilities, insufficient funds to hire professional archivists, the use of improper methods of acquisition and curation, and the view sometimes expressed by individuals that they are not quite sure what to do with their records and papers.

While professional archaeological projects have a good record of preserving artifacts, much work still needs to be done to preserve the documentary part of the database and the historical records associated with projects and with the discipline as a whole. Archaeologists have been deeply and actively concerned about preserving "the record" since the nineteenth century. Over the years, however, what constitutes data and "the record" has expanded, from simply objects preserved and displayed in decontextualized form to the addition of information on provenience and context in increasingly minute detail. This expansion of what constitutes the record has been especially evident since the advent of "salvage archaeology," and later, "cultural resource management," because of the awareness that sites may be — and probably will be — destroyed (e.g., Erickson et al. 1982). What is collected and kept is what

will remain and make up "the record" now and in the future. All kinds of archaeological records, even those we think of as being primarily of historical importance, thus have taken on additional significance for current and future research. This importance is currently being reemphasized in light of recent negotiations regarding repatriation and reburial issues. We all, therefore, must be actively concerned with preserving the archaeological records. While this discussion is confined primarily to preserving the archaeological record in the United States, it is applicable to other parts of the world as well.



Excavation at La Venta, Tabasco, Mexico, 1955. Papers of Robert F. Heizer. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

### **The Archaeological Record**

The archaeological record at its core is the database of the discipline. This includes not only all artifacts and ecofacts recovered from archaeological contexts but also the written and visual documentation of artifacts and ecofacts in their three-dimensional contextual relationships and environmental matrices. By "artifacts" is meant all physical remains of human cultural activity, from lithic debitage to "works of art" to structures large and small. "Ecofacts" are unmodified plant and animal remains, together with soils and geomorphological features useful in the reconstruction of past environments. Without proper written and visual documentation, artifacts and ecofacts are *meaningless* for scientific and culture-history purposes. Artifacts may be valued as art objects if they have some record of source and a genealogy of ownership (provenience). Our concern here, however, is with documentary *provenience* for scientific and culture-history purposes.<sup>1</sup>

It is useful to distinguish between provenience documentation, analytic documentation, administrative documentation, and project ("published") reports (Sprague 1982). Provenience documentation consists of field, accession, and catalog records. Field records document actual field

research, and include site survey forms, excavation field notes, sketches, maps, specimen provenience catalogs, still photographs and slides, videotapes and motion picture film, which record field research and field data. These documents contain the relational and contextual data needed to construct culture histories and to test scientific hypotheses. Field notes and specimen provenience catalogs are especially critical.

Accession records include all documentation deposited with archaeological collections in a curation facility or repository. Catalog records, often separated from accession records, include information on specific objects and lots of objects created either in the laboratory or the repository. Ideally, accession records should contain copies of all field records (or a clear statement as to where such records are housed) and all the normal records required by the curation facility. We call special attention to accession records because, in many instances, they contain otherwise unavailable information about the collections and the sites from which they derive. Accession records, especially those of older collections, often contain extensive correspondence useful not only in relation to the particular collections and projects but also for the history of archaeology and anthropology in general. For example, the accession records for many anthropology and archaeology collections curated in the American Museum of Natural History, the Smithsonian Institution, and other repositories have extensive related correspondence files of great value for understanding the collections *per se* and for the histories of anthropology, museums, and collections practices, and often for biographical information on collectors and excavators as well. Accession records also generally contain legal documents that reflect ownership and custodianship. In this category too, in conjunction with catalog records there are often conservation records that record actions — such as stabilization, preservation, and restoration — that have been undertaken in the field, laboratory, or curation center.

Analytic documentation includes records of laboratory analyses, such as radiometric assays, identifications of pollen, plant macrofossils and animal bones, and metallurgical and chemical assays; primary metric data, including artifact measurements, identification and classification; and qualitative analyses such as descriptions of rock art and pottery design. These records might be called primary analytic records. Secondary analytic records consist of such items as computer printouts of statistical and other analytic manipulations (both quantitative and qualitative) of primary data.

Administrative documentation includes materials related to the context of a specific field or laboratory project: research designs, requests for proposals, grant proposals, scopes of work, contracts, and related correspondence, and personnel and financial records. These records provide both intellectual and administrative information. Research designs, grant proposals, and scopes of work relate a specific project to extant methods, knowledge and theory, showing how a proposed field or laboratory study was designed to advance knowledge. Contracts and related records provide information about the implementation of a project. Such documentation is often very valuable for the history of research in a specific region and for the overall history of archaeology as a discipline.

Site:	<i>Walter site</i>	Map Reference	
Location	<i>1/2 mi. south of Olatoma, Lane county, Kansas</i>		<i>SE4+SW4 S28 T18R27W</i>
Owner	<i>S. E. Walter, Olatoma, Kansas, owns west part; east part by Mary J. Hineman, Dighton, Mo.</i>		
Type of site	<i>Village - composite</i>	Culture affiliations	
Nearest water	<i>Dry spring at south edge of terrace; dry creek on south, west, and south.</i>		
General surroundings	<i>Occupies small terrace on left bank of south Walnut cr; steep bluffs on west across creek; slightly higher terrace toward east. Cottonwood &amp; hackberry (both native), also walnut &amp; ash.</i>		
Area of occupation	<i>Estim 3-5 acres</i>	Depth of occupation	<i>Sum to 44"; reported to ca. 6'</i>
Character of fill	<i>Dark gray stratum, mixed with bone, stones, trash, etc; overlain by 6" light brown dust.</i>		
Specimens	<i>Broken animal bones abundant; rocks, flints and flint chips, shells, etc. Numerous small notched points &amp; end scrapers; also heavy stemmed points, worked skull, &amp; some bones.</i>		
Pottery	<i>Shards suggestive of both Upper Republican &amp; Woodland types, seem to be fairly plentiful.</i>		
Remarks	<i>Area ca. 25 X 35 yards dug over by E. W. Walter, whose collection remains at the present owner's house. Presence of two pottery &amp; projectile types suggests possibility of stratification, and because site is small &amp; concentrated makes excavation highly desirable. No recent digging noted; owner is favorably disposed toward digging.</i>		
Sherd bags marked		Photographed	<i>8/2/39</i>
Date	<i>8/2/39</i>	Recorded by	<i>Wedel</i>

Archaeological locality file for the Walter Site. Waldo R. Wedel Papers, National Anthropological Archives.

Project reports present the findings of a project, analyses of artifacts, ecofacts, and contextual relationships, and the relation of the data presented to the larger body of archaeological knowledge. Important here are preliminary as well as final reports, appendices as well as texts. Because of the problems discussed below, we have avoided the use of the term "published report." As in other subfields of anthropology, a great part of the results of archaeological field work is never published. One has but to look at the publication record of field schools to realize that the archaeological record is all that exists in many cases. The problem applies to avocational as well as professional projects.

### Curation and Documentation Strategies

Collections of artifacts and ecofacts without accompanying documentation are useless. Hence, collections and accompanying documentation *must* be curated together (Ford 1980). For curation purposes, we can distinguish among the several forms of documentation mentioned above as "primary" and "secondary." Primary documentation includes field, accession, and other provenience records, primary analytic records, and at least one copy of the project report(s). Project reports (preliminary and final) should also be deposited in libraries, laboratories, and archives. One copy should accompany and remain with the collections in the area in which they are curated. In the category of primary documentation are also administrative documents, as described above.

The primary documents as a whole form the "accession record" for each collection of artifacts and ecofacts. Copies of related correspondence and financial records may be deposited in a separate archive, but if possible they should be kept as part of the accession record. This is not always easy, given the manner in which repositories and curation facilities are organized; they often separate these types of records. Minimally, if

related records are not held with accession records, there should be a clear statement with the accession records as to their disposition. Ideally, all primary documentation should be kept in at least two sets, each set stored in a separate building or archival facility. This prevents accidental destruction of irreplaceable materials due to fire, flood, and human error (such as loss and misfiling).

"Secondary" documentation comprises secondary analytic materials: computer printouts of statistical runs, preliminary charts, and the like. The consensus among collections curators is that such documents are not of long-term value. The paper should be recycled, as long as the primary analytic data and a computer printout of that material are saved. However, a log should be made of the analyses done, with notation of the computer software used to produce the primary and secondary documentation included in the archived records.

### **Cultural Resource Management and the Archaeological Record**

The preponderance of archaeological research in the United States since the 1920s has been conducted within "salvage" and, more recently, "management" frameworks, supported directly or indirectly by the federal government. (In recent years state and municipal governments have also funded such research.) As the federal government became increasingly and more directly involved in large-scale dam and reservoir, highway, canal and other construction projects, it began supporting programs of "salvage archaeology." That is, government funds were provided for the excavation of archaeological sites and related studies prior to their destruction by flooding, land alteration, or other circumstances. The program was expanded through various WPA archaeological projects in the 1930s (Fowler 1986a). After World War II, salvage archaeology continued to grow in tandem with the great expansion of federal projects. Passage of various federal historic preservation laws between 1961 and 1988, together with related federal regulations, created a "Federal Preservation System." That part of the system centering on archaeology came to be labeled "Cultural Resource Management" (CRM) (Fowler 1982, 1986b).

The establishment and expansion of federally mandated CRM programs has led to an exponential increase in the number of archaeological collections and related documents that have to be curated. (Hereafter, "collections" will be used to mean collections of artifacts, ecofacts *and* related documents.) This has created a space problem for curation facilities. It has also led to a major data flow and data recovery problem, the so-called gray literature issue. A small percentage of CRM-generated collections is housed in federal curation facilities operated by the National Park Service, the Smithsonian Institution, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The bulk of such collections is housed in curation facilities operated by universities, museums, and research institutes (Lindsay et al. 1979; Marquardt 1977; Thompson 1974; Trimble and Meyers 1990).<sup>2</sup> A standard procedure has been for archaeologists who do CRM work, and are from institutions with curation facilities, to house the collections generated by their work in their home facilities. Private consultants, environmental consulting

firms, and engineering firms that undertake CRM projects or contract for such work must make a curation agreement with a federally recognized curation facility, requiring the company (or the sponsor) to pay the curation facility to curate the records.

The curation problem has been growing at a horrendous rate for decades. The National Park Service did not issue curation regulations until 1990 (Section 36 of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, Part 79; see U.S. National Park Service 1991). Under the regulations, all collections generated by any federally mandated, funded, or licensed project must be "properly" curated in perpetuity in an approved curation facility.<sup>3</sup> The costs of such curation are very high. Only in the past few years have curation costs been included as a line item in federal CRM contracts and cooperative agreements. A common charge by some curation facilities is \$500 per cubic foot.<sup>4</sup> Whether up-front curation charges are adequate for "in-perpetuity" curation is problematic; fees are generally used to process the materials. This issue has serious implications for the long-term preservation of archaeological documentation.

### **The Gray Literature**

Federal or state CRM project contracts and agreements (to say nothing of contracts with private firms) rarely specify that project reports be published through standard academic channels, such as scholarly journals, monograph series, and books, or be reported on at professional meetings. In some instances, a project report on file with the funding agency or private company that commissioned the work, and perhaps with a State Historic Preservation office, is deemed sufficient to fulfill the contract. The dissemination or "publication" of CRM project reports ranges, as a result, from this "worst case" minimum up to full publication of a book through a scholarly press. (It should be noted, of course, that non-CRM archaeological projects often carry no mandate to disseminate the results of a research project in any form, except for peer pressure.) In recent years, the problem has been exacerbated by the advent of microcomputers and "desktop publishing" software, since with such equipment it is relatively easy to produce small reports to meet minimal contract requirements. Manuscripts and drafts are no longer retained, and the reports are increasingly difficult to track.

The magnitude of the problem is difficult to convey. Under federal and state laws and related regulations, *any* project that is federally (and often state) mandated, funded, licensed, insured, or approved must have one or another level of archaeological "assessment," "clearance," or "mitigation" work done and approved. This may vary from a straightforward survey of a small plot of land for a geothermal drill test pad to a major excavation program extending over many years at a cost of millions of dollars. The great majority of all CRM projects are of the small survey type. Federal and state agency rules and policies vary as to artifact collection for such projects — some allow or require collecting, some forbid it. All, however, require a report, ranging from a "letter report" stating what was done and what was found (if anything), to a multi-volume "monograph" reporting numerous sites and artifact

collections. Whatever the length or scope of a report, all are extremely valuable to the archaeological record.

A major concern to the archaeology of any region is the presence, or the absence, of archaeological sites. Negative evidence (i.e., no sites) is as valuable for the understanding of past human-environmental interaction as is positive evidence of the presence of sites during one or more time periods. This must be coupled with the fact that the only data archaeologists will ever have about the acreage covered by surveys of all the thousands of drill pads, fence lines, and access roads are the letter reports on file in one or a few agency offices, and unfortunately many of these agencies have record retention policies that discard reports or transfer them to repositories with limited access after a specified period of time, sometimes as short as five years.

The federal government has responded to the problem in several ways, among them by the establishment of a national archaeological database (Farley et al. 1991) and pilot studies of other electronic technologies. These will be useful only to the extent that they are compatible with existing databases in museums, libraries and archives and address the problems noted in Robert V. Kemper's essay in this volume. The success of the program for the gray literature in applied anthropology (described by van Willigen) and the fact that the Society of American Archivists has recently agreed upon a computerized database for all archives in the country should help with this effort.

To summarize, federal and now state land managing agencies are mandated to preserve, manage and study cultural resources. This has resulted in the collection of a huge volume of objects and associated records. Recent guidelines provide a framework for properly curating these materials and records of the past. However, the task cannot be borne entirely by the federal and state agencies. Professional (and amateur) organizations and individual scholars must join in the effort. The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) has initiated one such program (Givens 1990, 1992).

### **The SAA Program**

The Society for American Archaeology's Committee on the History of Archaeology (COHA) was born out of discussions among the participants in a conference on the Historiography of Archaeology in 1987 at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Don Fowler, then president of SAA, carried the conference participants' request to the SAA's Executive Board, and the Society subsequently appointed an *ad hoc* committee on the history of archaeology. The committee had the following charge: (1) to develop and institute a systematic program to seek out archival materials and, as necessary, facilitate their disposition in appropriate facilities; (2) to compile and publish an inventory of known archival sources for the history of archaeology in the United States, a catalog with aspirations to definitiveness; (3) to develop a computerized database to facilitate continual cataloguing of material relating to the history of archaeology; and (4) to assess the possibility of creating a temporary clearinghouse for the disposition of records relating to the development of Americanist archaeology. It was felt that the clearinghouse would

facilitate preservation of records and encourage proper archiving of documentary materials, by identifying and holding materials "awaiting an archival home" to ensure their future preservation and conservation.



Pecos Conference 1927. Pictured: Oliver Ricketson, J.B. Thoburn, E.B. Renaud, Jesse L. Nusbaum, A.E. Douglass, Harry L. Shapiro, Neil M. Judd, Erna Gunther Spier (?), Kenneth M. Chapman, Madeleine A. Kidder, A.V. Kidder, Linda Roberts, Frank H.H. Roberts, Jr., Clara Lee Fraps (Tanner), Lansing Bloom, Miss Penner (Mrs. Emil Haury), Emil W. Haury, Dean Byron Cummings, Leslie Spier, Mrs. Oliver Ricketson (Edith B.), Francis R. Morley, Charles Amsden, Earl H. Morris, Ann A. Morris, Alfred L. Kroeber, Charlotte Gower, J.A.B. Scherer, Harriet Cosgrove, Sylvanus G. Morley. Copy made by Emil Haury in 1967 from a print made by C.B. Cosgrove. National Anthropological Archives, Photo Lot 33. Inv. 02873700.

COHA is concerned with the preservation of all the types of archaeological records discussed above, as well as the records of regional and national archaeological societies, the private papers of archaeologists and paleoenvironmentalists, and oral histories relevant to the history of archaeology. An Advanced Seminar at the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1990, co-sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, allowed the committee to formulate and begin to implement a long-term plan. The procedures outlined by Kenworthy et al. (1985) were major sources of guidance.

The plan involves four stages. (1) A survey of known repositories will be made to identify those with holdings, interests and operating structures that will permit them to serve as contributing institutions for the formulation of a database. (2) A central office or clearinghouse, with a coordinator, will be established to conduct pilot surveys of repositories in different regions of the United States. (3) Based on the findings of



these pilot surveys, a plan will be formulated to carry out more extensive surveys in regions throughout the country, using regional survey teams to identify the nature and extent of relevant materials. (4) The central office will then assume the role of a permanent clearinghouse and act as a focal point for the solicitation of records (in private hands or non-repository situations) and arrange for their disposition in appropriate repositories. To aid in the effort, a newsletter, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* (Douglas R. Givens, editor), has been established and is published twice a year.

Once this plan has been realized, the problems and possibilities of establishing an oral history program will be considered. The proposed computerized database would be accessible from existing systems such as RLIN (Research Library Information Network), OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), and the National Archaeological Database. We also hope that the proposed system will be compatible with the system recently approved by the Society of American Archivists as the national standard for archival inventories and databases.

The records of archaeology are worth saving, and preserving them is a moral imperative and a professional responsibility for all archaeologists. Directors of both CRM and non-CRM projects must undertake this responsibility before the beginning of any project, to ensure that the record that is produced will be saved in an efficient and comprehensive manner. This will not be easy, because of the nature of the record, the size and scope of the problem, and the social organization of archaeological activities. There will always be a tendency for the documentary records of any project to become scattered, for archaeology is a team endeavor. Often specialists performing the analyses of particular materials are not located in the facilities of the project, and their records are spatially separated from the rest of the project. Project directors must ensure that the documents produced by these specialists are retained with the rest of the project records. In addition, many projects are multi-year endeavors and may experience significant changes in personnel; a number of individuals will have a vested interest in any one project. Moreover, there is a tendency for repositories to access the documents for a project by year, with the result that materials are not located together and the materials from a single project may have several accession numbers and accession documents. Artifacts and ecofacts may be turned over to a repository before the rest of the documents and become separated.

It is urgent that archaeological documentary records be identified, located, and preserved before more are destroyed by neglect. The thrust of the SAA's program to date has been to identify and preserve documentary materials charting the development of archaeological sciences and to publicize these resources among those interested in documenting and analyzing the history of the discipline. This charge should now be broadened to include all of the archaeological record. The SAA COHA program can easily be tailored to be part of a larger national effort to preserve all archaeological records. In addition, the committee's current objective of creating a records database with information pertinent to the history of archaeology can be consolidated with the construction of integrated databases containing data on completed

archaeological projects and repository locations. A further goal of this committee should be to increase awareness on the part of all archaeologists (professional and avocational) of their ethical responsibilities to ensure that documentary records as well as artifacts and ecofacts are preserved in usable form.

### **Summary**

- Preservation of the archaeological record includes not only objects in collections but also documentary records supporting these and records of the history of archaeology.
- Strategies of documentation in archaeology should take account of the need for records to be curated along with the collections they support.
- Archaeology in the United States presents special problems because of the volume of materials and relevant records resulting from legislation and cultural resource management; special strategies will be required for dealing with this volume while maintaining information and access as part of a discipline-wide strategy.
- The program for preservation of records of the history of archaeology in the United States begun by the Society for American Archaeology can serve as a model for other anthropological associations; this program should be expanded to include concerns for the preservation of the entire archaeological record.

### **Notes**

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1. The terms "provenience" and "provenance" are used here with the distinction commonly followed by natural history museum curators and archaeologists (provenience), as opposed to that of art curators, dealers, and critics (provenance).

2. This is an unusual procedure for the federal government, reflecting the fact that archaeological records are different from the records produced by governmental agencies or under contract for federal agencies. Most federal records, paper or otherwise, are turned over to the National Archives or are under the control of the National Archivist who authorizes their disposition.

3. The Department of the Interior published in 1991 *Interim Standards for Documentation, Preservation, and Protection of Museum Property*. "Museum property" includes more than archaeological collections, but the standards in this document should be considered in conjunction with the curation standards issued by the National Park Service. Coordinate standards have also been issued by the Society for California Archaeology, *State of California Guidelines for the Curation of Archaeological Collections*, 1992.

4. The \$500 per cubic foot fee is based on standard 12 x 12 x 12 inch artifact storage boxes. Curation facilities formerly varied wildly on how much and what forms of documentation (accession records) must accompany artifact collections.