

II.

Curation Guidelines

Curation Guidelines: Artifacts, Samples, Materials, and Project and Site Documentation

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Introduction

These curation guidelines respond to concerns regarding the appropriate conservation and curation of archeological objects, samples, materials, notes, maps, and other archival and project documentation. Recent federal legislation precludes private contracting firms from curating archeological collections generated by federal historic preservation legislation. As museums and other curation facilities face serious space and storage problems and rising costs associated with long-term curation, there is a continuing debate over exactly what should be curated in perpetuity. Members of the Wisconsin Archeological Survey need to ensure appropriate treatment for the archeological collections they generate, regardless of the source funding for any research project. The Survey would like to take a leadership role in ensuring the safe storage and availability of these collections, materials, and documentation for future research and interpretation.

Because the process of field archeology is destructive, many sites will not be preserved for future research unless care is given to the curation of collections, records, and documents. The primary purpose of curation is to care for these artifacts and documents to ensure their availability for further study. Due to the rapid destruction of archeological sites in Wisconsin by both development and natural processes,

the scholarly and informational value of curated collections increases steadily through time.

The no-collection policy espoused by some federal agencies is not acceptable in Wisconsin. It is important that archeologists either collect all classes of materials from archeological sites or develop a sampling approach to ensure that all material classes are appropriately represented in the assemblage curated for each archeological site. Classes of material remains and other types of samples (soil, charcoal, wood, pollen, etc.) that should be collected vary according to the age and type of archeological site.

The documentation that should accompany artifact assemblages includes original field notes, project and site maps, photographs and negatives, site forms, correspondence files, other types of field and laboratory analysis forms, and other relevant information. The agreement between an archeologist and a curation facility should include procedures for identifying (accessioning), recording (cataloging), and maintaining (storing and retrieving) the provenience of all collected artifacts, samples, and documents. There is considerable variation in institutional policies regarding how collections are labeled, organized, and stored, but professional museum cataloging and curation practices should be followed. Generally, artifacts are labeled and cataloged with their primary provenience information and stored in

containers that meet museum conservation guidelines.

Costs associated with the long-term curation of archeological materials are the responsibility of the federal or state agency funding the research. It is acceptable under federal historic preservation legislation to request payment for curation services as part of the contract for archeological services (see 36 CFR Part 79, Section 79.7).

Federal Guidelines

The following is taken from the *Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Archeological Documentation* (1983), subheading "Curation":

Archeological specimens and records are part of the documentary record of an archeological site. They should be curated for future use in research, interpretation preservation, and resource management activities. Curation of important archeological specimens and records should be provided for in the development of any archeological program or project.

Archeological specimens and records that should be curated are those that embody the information important to history and prehistory. They include artifacts and their associated documents, photographs, maps, and field notes; materials of an environmental nature such as bones, shells, soil and sediment samples, wood, seeds, pollen and their associated records; and the products and associated records of laboratory procedures such as thin sections, and sediment fraction that result from the analysis of archeological data.

Recent federal legislation has more specifically defined the responsibility of federal agencies to ensure that archeological collections generated through public archeology projects are properly documented, curated, and made available for ongoing research. This legislation is titled, *Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archeological Collections* (36 CFR Part 79).

Archeologists conducting field investigations and generating archeological collections and data from sites on federal or tribal land should adhere to the requirements of the *Archeological Resources Protection Act*. This act requires that archeologists obtain an ARPA permit that addresses appropriate curation, as mandated under 36 CR 79. Archeologists should also be aware of their responsibility to meet the requirements of the *Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA).

State Guidelines

Wisconsin Historic Preservation legislation defines the responsibility of the Office of the State Archaeologist to oversee archeological research on state lands (public lands) as defined under *Field Archaeology* (s.44.47, *Wis.Stats.*). Prior to conducting field investigations on public lands, archeologists should obtain a permit from the Office of the State Archaeologist, Division of Historic Preservation (SHSW). To receive a permit to conduct archeological investigations on public lands, as defined in s.44.47, *Wis.Stats.*, the archeologist should demonstrate that the collection, materials, and documentation will be curated at an appropriate facility. The ownership, custody, and use of objects and data are defined as follows:

The state reserves to itself the title to all objects found and data gathered in field archeology on state sites. Although a permit may name a custodian other than the Historical Society, title to the objects and data discovered at state sites is reserved to the Historical Society as trustee for the state. Physical possession of such objects shall revert to the state if the custodian is not properly caring for them or keeping them conveniently available for study by students of archeology (s44.47[5], *Wis.Stats.*).

It is the responsibility of the archeologist conducting field investigations to inform property managers where the archeological materials will be curated. Should problems arise re-

garding the curation of materials from field investigations being conducted under a state permit (s44.47, *Wis.Stats.*), the Office of the State Archaeologist should be notified.

Removal of Artifacts from Private Property

In Wisconsin, the opinion of the State Attorney General's Office is that artifacts remain the property of the landowner unless a written agreement has been signed specifying ownership of artifacts, samples, and other items removed during field work. The following "permission form" was approved by the State Attorney General's Office as representing a legal and binding agreement. It was developed in response to an increasing number of conflicts involving archeologists, property owners, and agencies, as to who owns the artifacts. Its intended use is for projects that involve excavation of substantial artifact assemblages, such as the Phase II evaluation of a site. It is recommended that a formal agreement be negotiated between the agency and the private property owner to ensure professional curation of archeological collections.

graph of all diagnostic artifacts, including appropriate measurements, in the report detailing the results of the field investigations. For state or federal compliance projects, archeologists should notify the appropriate agency, in writing, of the terms of the agreement with the property owner.

- provide appropriate facilities, equipment, space, and professional staff to properly store, conserve, and study the collection
- provide adequate security for the collection

Guidelines for Curation Facilities

Professional archeologists should ensure that the collections, materials, and documentation they generate are curated at an acceptable curation facility. The Office of State Archaeologist can provide guidance in finding and determining the appropriateness of a curation facility. Temporary curation is acceptable only if the material is protected and arrangements are made for permanent curation within a specified time frame. Information on the location and nature of curated materials should be provided in technical reports (also see “Technical Report Guidelines”). If the curation facility is managed by a different organization or institution, the report should include a letter indicating the willingness of the curation facility to accept and curate the collection.

Many institutions in Wisconsin that currently curate archeological collections would find it difficult to meet the federal curation guidelines (see 36 CFR 79.9). The institution should be able to ensure perpetual preservation of the material and ensure that the items are retrievable for future research and interpretation. At a minimum, an institution curating archeological collections should

- accession, label, catalog, store, maintain, inventory, and conserve the collection on a long-term basis, using professional museum and archival practices
- maintain complete records on the collection, including acquisition records; inventories, field notes, forms, and reports; photographs, negatives, and slides; accurate location information; conservation information; and any records on lost, deteriorated, damaged, or deaccessioned and transferred materials