

**PREPARING ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
FOR THE MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

November 11, 2003

Archaeological collections deposited in the Maxwell Museum are held for future research, exhibition, instruction, and possibly repatriation or other disposition. Collections from federal lands are federal property and will be curated in compliance with 36 CFR Part 79, "Curation of Federally-owned and Administered Archaeological Collections." The following are necessary steps toward curating collections at the Maxwell. Variances are sometimes allowed but should be approved in writing by the Curator of Archaeology. Web sources for curation methods and materials are provided at the end of this guide. If after reading this guide you are not sure how to proceed, contact the Curator of Archaeology for guidance.

STEP 1: OBTAIN A CURATION AGREEMENT

The Maxwell Museum accepts collections that, in its sole judgment, are consistent with its mission. The Museum accepts all archaeological collections produced by the University of New Mexico but is otherwise selective in what it accepts. Please do not assume that we will accept your collection until you have a signed agreement to that effect. The agreement will state the Maxwell's fee for accepting the collection.

The Maxwell does not accession items obtained illegally, including in violation of U.S. customs law or antiquities laws applicable to the place of origin. The agreement will stipulate what should be discarded from the collection before submission. In most cases the Maxwell does not accept the following; exceptions should be stipulated and justified in the agreement:

- Items with high bulk or weight and low information value, such as fire-cracked rock, adobe, and ground stone fragments (if less than half of the original tool). Flotation and other bulk soil samples should be processed before submission even if the contents are not analyzed. If field sampling was highly redundant, consider discarding some samples.
- Items for which exact provenience has been lost. (However, some of those items may be useful additions to the Maxwell's "teaching collections," which are used for archaeological training or public outreach. If you have items that may be useful additions to the teaching collections, please contact the Curator of Archaeology.)
- Unstable items. If the items can be stabilized, do so before submission. If stabilization is not practical, the appropriate course is careful documentation before the item deteriorates any further.
- Items that have been treated with hazardous chemicals, including wood samples treated with gasoline and paraffin or sherds soaked in acid solutions. Also, items stabilized or labeled with non-archival materials such as Duco cement, clear or white nail polish, and typing correction fluid.

STEP 2: START AN INVENTORY

Every archaeological submission must include an inventory of what is being submitted. Your inventory will become the basic document for the museum accession and cataloguing process, and should include the following information:

- A list of all the bags and individual remains being submitted, and their provenience. Your “bag list” or “field specimen” list is a good starting point.
- A list of all the paper records being submitted. The museum will catalogue your records, just as it does artifacts. Some types of records can be lumped (e.g., “Folder of feature forms, LA ____”) but others should be listed individually (e.g., “36 by 24 inch map of LA _____, rolled in tube”).
- A list of the rolls and/or disks of photos being submitted, and an attached second copy of the photo logs.
- A list of any computer data records being submitted.
- A list of any other media, such as DVD or CD video or audio recordings.

If items were discarded, submitted for destructive analysis, or lost, include this information so future researchers don’t go looking for things that no longer exist. Include any other information that future researchers may need to understand what you are submitting and how that submission is organized.

STEP 3: INNER PACKAGING AND PACKAGE LABELING

Do not write on or otherwise directly label artifacts during your processing and analysis. Any direct labeling of artifacts will be done by the Maxwell after the collection is received.

As a rule, anything that is usually studied individually (such as a bone awl) deserves to be bagged or otherwise packaged individually. Things that are usually studied in lots (such as potsherds and debitage) can be bagged or otherwise packaged as a lot.

The optimum packaging for most archaeological artifacts is archival zip-lock polyethylene bags (at least 4 mil thick). The items should be completely dry before being placed in the bags; if necessary, air-dry the item in a room with low humidity (e.g., fully air-conditioned offices) at room temperature, for as many days as is needed. If residual moisture is unavoidable, poke small holes in the bag to prevent condensation, but be aware that the holes reduce the protection provided by the bag.

For wood, bone, fiber, and other organic materials, packing materials such as acid-free tissue and polyethylene foam can be used to physically stabilize the materials. Delicate items should be packaged to survive shipping and other rough handling (for example, use a small archival box

with tissue or foam as padding). Items should be unable to fly about the inside of the package if dropped or shaken.

As items or lots are packaged, include a provenience slip inside the package. This slip should be acid-free paper and should be prepared using a laser printer or black ink. Color inks should not be used, as most will fade. Minimum information for the slips includes project name, site number, bag/field specimen number, provenience within the site, general nature of the item (e.g., “ground stone”), and count (this last for lots). Leave room on the slip for the catalogue number, which will be added by Maxwell staff.

The information on the slip is also applied to the container itself. Use a Sharpie to apply this information to polyethylene bags and similar materials; black ink can be used on small archival boxes.

If you bag multiple items as a single lot but break them down to finer levels during analysis, you can put the sub-lots in over-the-counter locking sandwich bags marked with a Sharpie, or with an inserted slip of acid-free paper. To illustrate: if you catalogue all sherds from a provenience as a single lot, but analyze them by type, it is acceptable to place the Santa Fe Black-on-white sherds in a sandwich bag, with an inserted label that says only “Santa Fe B/W.” This is for the convenience of researchers and, because the process can be reconstructed, the sub-lot bags do not have to be completely archival or fully labeled.

Some researchers like to submit cut-outs from field paper bags, to preserve the provenience information as recorded in the field. We strongly encourage this practice. Do not put the cut-outs in the inner packaging, however, unless you place them in their own polyethylene bag—this way the artifacts and non-archival paper no longer touch. You may instead place the cut-outs in the shipping box, as described below.

Do not apply adhesive labels directly to artifacts or to the packaging for those artifacts. Among other things, the adhesives will eventually fail and the labels will fall off.

STEP 4: BOXING

If you are willing to box your collection using archival boxes and personally deliver your collection to the Maxwell, the cost of the archival boxes can be deducted from your curation fee. Currently, the Maxwell recommends using Hollinger record storage boxes, Item No. 10760, or Hollinger Half Size record storage boxes, Item No. 10755, or the equivalent product from other distributors of archival materials. These boxes are formed and closed without boxing tape and with proper care may last more than a century.

If you use commercial boxes (including because you plan to ship the collection to the Maxwell), most commercial cardboard boxes will do (they will be discarded as soon as the collections are transferred to archival boxes). Do not use old grocery store boxes, which may contain food residue, or boxes in poor condition. Avoid boxes larger than about 1 cubic foot—storage in

larger boxes can lead to crushing of artifacts, and the boxes may be too heavy for one person to lift safely. For items such as ground stone, use a small box (e.g., 1/2 cubic foot) to reduce weight.

Similar items should be boxed together. Put flaked stone in one box and potsherds in another box, for example. Nonetheless, don't be afraid to create a mixed box rather than have two or more partly filled boxes.

Large metates (and similarly large, heavy items) do not have to be boxed if delivered personally, but in that case they should be bagged in oversized polyethylene bags if possible, and padded if stacked. If you cannot locate an archival bag that is large enough, tie the metate with cotton twine as you would a parcel, forming an "X" on each side, and attach an acid-free tag with the provenience information at the knot. If you do box the oversized items, avoid creating boxes that are too heavy to be lifted safely by one person.

If you save cut-out portions of the paper bags used during fieldwork, but do not place them in the individual artifact bags as described above, place the cut-outs in a separate archival polyethylene bag and place that bag in the shipping box with the corresponding artifact bags.

In boxing the collections, don't forget the original field and lab records! Those should be given a box of their own. Please be aware that photographic prints, negatives, and slides, along with their photo logs, will be removed and curated separately, so pack photographic items together in the box. Guidelines for photographic materials are appended.

Finally, label one end of each box, using a Sharpie. In the upper left corner (below where the lid, if any, will sit), write the project name (or your institution's name), the site number(s), and the most specific provenience shared by all items in the box. In the lower left corner, indicate the basic contents (e.g., "ground stone" or "mixed materials"). Finally, number the boxes in the upper right corner (below where the lid, if any, will sit), in some logical order (e.g., sherds first, then flaked stone, etc.). Put the document boxes at the end of the number series, and include your inventory in the final box.

STEP 5: SHIPPING AND INSURANCE

Collections are vulnerable to damage or loss during shipment. Packing must guard against damage from sudden movements, impact, and crushing. However, some fragile objects may suffer more from the effects of over-zealous packing than from shipping itself. If in doubt, consult with Museum staff.

If possible, the researcher should make an appointment and hand-deliver the collection. If you ship by mail, courier, or transport service, take steps to anticipate loss. Register and/or insure the parcels so that tracing is possible. For insurance purposes, the Maxwell Museum determines the value of most collections to be the cost of field collection and analysis and/or the estimated cost of conducting a replacement collection and analysis. The Museum does not accept responsibility for collections that have not yet been physically deposited at the Museum.

A CLOSING PLEA: DOES IT REALLY DESERVE CURATION?

In the past, the assumption has been that bulk archaeological collections deserve curation until someone proves otherwise. This is one reason for the ongoing crisis in curation. Please ask yourself: does this item really deserve to be preserved forever? Reasons for concluding otherwise include vague provenience or loss of provenience, poor condition, and other factors that reduce the information potential of the artifact. Do we really need the artifacts from your backdirt pile? Do you really wish to pay for us to take them? Archaeologists are trained to throw things away in the field, starting with most of the dirt on the site and going on to sherds “smaller than a dime,” crumbs of animal bone, etc. Once the collections reach your lab, we ask you to apply similarly good professional judgment in deciding what to curate. If you have questions, call us.

Some things should always be curated, of course. These include the associated project photos and paper records, as well as burial contents and other items that are likely to be construed as culturally critical. The point is to not overwhelm curation facilities or future researchers with bags of items whose research potential has been exhausted by the existing report and other records.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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SOURCES AND RESOURCES

The Maxwell Museum and its Policies

Maxwell Museum Website: www.unm.edu/~maxwell

Includes online information about the Maxwell's Archaeology Department and its collections policies.

Archival Supplies

Associated Bag Co. (heavy polyethylene zip-lock bags): www.associatedbag.com, toll-free 800-926-6100

Gaylord: www.gaylord.com; toll-free 800-448-6160

Hollinger Corporation: www.hollingercorp.com; toll-free 800-634-0491.

Light Impressions (focus is photographic storage): www.lightimpressionsdirect.com, toll-free 800-828-6216

University Products: www.universityproducts.com; toll-free 800-628-1912.

Guidance

www.cr.nps.gov/aad/collections/index.htm

On-line guide to archaeological collections management, with links to many other web sites. For a book covering the same basic material, see:

Curating Archaeological Collections, From the Field to the Repository, by Lynne P. Sullivan and S. Terry Childs. Published in 2003 by AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, Ca. (www.altamirapress.com).

http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservoogram/cons_toc.html

Home of the Conserv-o-Gram, the NPS guide to finicky care of collections. Need to rid your boxes of vermin? Need to know what B-72 is? Try this web site.

ADDENDUM: PAPER RECORDS

The time to begin ensuring proper curation of a project's paper records is before the project begins. All of your records—including field records—should be on white, acid-free paper, which requires advance planning. White is best because it makes it easier to photocopy or scan records. If you are not sure about the acid content of your paper stock, you can check pH with test pens sold by archival supply companies.

Where possible, use a black-and-white laser printer to print your field and lab forms, or have them commercially printed using black ink. Forms printed on inkjet printers can run if wet, and most color inks fade in time. Fill out the forms using a soft pencil or black ink.

If you create paper records on questionable paper, with color inks, etc., make photocopies of those records and submitting the photocopies along with the original records.

Most “manila” folders and similar commercial filing materials are not acid-free and can damage records over time. If you submit your records in such folders, they will need to be replaced with archival folders. Please save us that step by maintaining a stock of archival folders for use with project documents.

Documents can be submitted in loose-leaf binders, but we prefer to have those documents removed from the binders and organized and submitted in folders.

Oversized documents, such as site maps, should be prepared on drafting paper and should be submitted rolled, in a tube, rather than folded. Keep oversized documents as small as possible, as they are expensive to store long-term.

The project inventory required by the Maxwell also needs to be “archival quality,” e.g., printed with a laser printer on acid-free paper.

Guidelines for photographic records are provided in a separate addendum.

**ADDENDUM: PREPARING PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIALS
AND SIMILAR MEDIA
FOR THE MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

Photographs, slides, negatives, films, audio tapes and digital image files are often part of an archeological submission to the Museum. Careful preservation of photographic, digital, and film can increase their longevity and research value. Increased humidity and temperature, pollutants and dust, and storage in acidic containers contribute to damage and deterioration of the materials.

If any photographic or film archival materials are included with a donation, they need to be flagged so the Photo Archivist can assess and re-house the material immediately after delivery. If possible, put the materials in dust-free boxes for delivery to the Museum. If the materials must be shipped, please consult with the Photo Archivist for specific instructions.

Please do not try to clean photographic materials, and please keep the original packaging (photo envelopes, negative sleeves, etc.) or documentation with the photographic or film materials.

If donating digital files on CDs or DVDs, please include any metadata (program used for transfer of material, dpi (dots per inch), photographer's and/or technician's name, format of image original, and whether in PC or Mac format) in a separate file on the disk. Please enclose the CD or DVD in acid-free or Tyvek sleeves, jewel cases, or polypropylene media cases to protect them.

If you have specific questions about the submission of photographic or film archival material, please contact the Photo Archivist:

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Email cbaudoin@unm.edu

**ADDENDUM: PREPARING HUMAN OSTEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
FOR THE MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

The Maxwell Museum's Laboratory of Human Osteology will not accept for curation Native American human remains or associated or unassociated funerary objects without written evidence of (1) right of possession by the party submitting the remains (as defined in NAGPRA), and (2) a transfer document giving the Museum the right of possession. Anyone wishing to submit Native American human remains or associated or unassociated funerary objects under other circumstances should consult the Laboratory staff.

All human remains, Native American and otherwise, transferred to the Maxwell Museum must have been cleaned, analyzed, and documented using Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains (available from the Department of Anthropology, University of Arkansas, Main 330, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701; tel. 501-575-5247); if not, an additional fee will be charged to cover this expense.

Box burials and funerary objects separately from other collections. In addition, each burial should be boxed separately, with skeletal remains and artifacts separated and padded as needed to prevent damage during shipping. Isolated elements from disarticulated burials may be shipped in the same box if clearly labeled with provenience information and padded as needed to prevent damage.

Human skeletal materials are accepted on the condition that Maxwell Museum staff members have full control and responsibility for maintaining collections. In addition, the Curator of Human Osteology, in conjunction with the director of the Maxwell Museum, will make decisions concerning research access to the collection. This access may include bone reconstruction, photography, or destructive analysis, unless otherwise specifically stated in the collections acquisition agreement.

If you have any specific questions about the donation of human skeletal material, please contact the Curator of Human Osteology:

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