

A Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia



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The Collections Committee thanks everyone who participated in the survey and accepts responsibility for any omissions or inaccuracies presented in the report. It is our hope that this report is the first chapter of a revitalized emphasis on archaeological collections in Virginia.

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I. Introduction

“The future of archaeology is in excavating the collection” Terry Childs (2004).

In December 2009, the Council of Virginia Archaeologists’ (COVA’s) Legislative Affairs Committee alerted COVA’s Collections Committee that continued support of archaeological collections held by Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources (DHR) was in jeopardy due to funding threats. DHR staff responded, with input from the Collections Committee, by authoring a justification for collections – a white paper that could be circulated to archaeology supporters and constituents and be used as talking points in conversations with members of the General Assembly and other elected officials. This exercise raised a number of questions about the curatorial facility at DHR and other repositories throughout the state. It also served as the catalyst to push forward our efforts to help improve the state of archaeological collections in Virginia.

The current mission of the Collections Committee is to improve the value, image and perceived importance of archaeological assemblages to many audiences statewide, including but not limited to legislators, city and county bureaucrats, politicians, researchers, descendant communities and the general public. Turning this threat into a collective momentum to work towards highlighting the importance of archaeological collections that pertain to Virginia’s prehistoric and historic past became the primary goal of the Collections Committee from late 2009 through 2011 and resulted in this report and the supporting survey data.

The issues addressed in this report are not new; archaeologists have long identified a collections “crisis,” a term that was used nearly 30 years ago to detail the concerns involved in caring for the artifacts and supporting documentation recovered from archaeological fieldwork (Marquardt et al. 1982). For three decades, archaeologists have discussed and written about this crisis, mainly with each other. During this time there have been incremental and spotty improvements in the curation of archaeological remains and in the justification for their curation. Archaeological organizations’ ethics statements and federal regulations, including 36CFR Part 79, specifically address the curation of archaeological remains¹. However, the recent threats to the DHR funding changed this dynamic. We, as professional archaeologists, can no longer discuss the collections crisis. It is time for the archaeological community to directly address our archaeological collections and work on a united front to ensure that Virginia’s archaeological collections are documented, organized, accessible and secure.

This report is not intended to be another false alarm about the impending crisis. The significance of COVA’s repository survey is the compilation of data outlining the many issues involved, and

¹ The DHR guidelines *State Collections Management Standards*, outlines the treatment and documentation for archaeological collections, specifically those being transferred to their facility in Richmond. These standards are consistent with 36 CFR Part 79 and provide an excellent outline of how to care for archaeological materials (DHR 2011).

the breadth of this crisis, within the Commonwealth. This report gathers data from more than 100 repositories and Appendix D discusses a related topic concerning the locations of archaeological collections documented on the archaeological site forms entered in the DHR's Data Sharing System (DSS). Together, this two-pronged research endeavor outlines the state of Virginia's archaeological collections and provides recommendations to begin addressing these complexities.

Under our current guise, Virginia's archaeological collections, and with this we refer not only to artifacts, but also to ecofacts, field notes, photographs, maps, reports, special samples – everything that provides data about an archaeological site – are thought of as individual, isolated entities which are dealt with in a variety of ways. With this survey, information about Virginia's fragmented archaeological collections has, for the first time, been collected and collated in a systematic, big-picture manner. The Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia is the first step in shifting the current paradigm away from exclusion and fragmentation and toward a philosophical understanding of our tangible, archaeological past as a collective whole.

II. The Value of Archaeological Collections

Archaeological excavation is a destructive process. This tenet is preached in every introductory archaeology course throughout the world and archaeologists are trained to be meticulous record keepers. Artifacts, and other associated samples recovered from archaeological sites, become the tangible legacy and in many cases the only physical evidence of these places. The field notes, photographs, maps, artifact catalogues and reports serve as the roadmap to understanding each site's artifacts. Together, all these pieces constitute an archaeological collection. These collections, like the sites they come from, are nonrenewable resources and are a unique piece of our collective past.

Archaeological collections are important for a variety of reasons and the members of COVA's Collections Committee acknowledge that professional archaeologists encounter diverse experiences working with collections and hold varying reflections about their importance. The committee therefore advocates defining collections within a theoretical framework of "value." Archaeological remains and their associated supporting details do not have an intrinsic value; instead the people who excavate, protect, use and interact with them impose value based upon their individual cultural constructs and needs. Determination of value is therefore fluid and must be viewed within a larger context of how and why the archaeological materials are being collected and used. Value is placed on a collection as soon as archaeological excavation commences as decisions are constantly made about what to collect, how to collect and what types of records are generated. After excavation, common values associated with archaeological collections include research, education, exhibit, aesthetic, spiritual and historical, but the committee realizes that there are many more value categories. This report includes four case studies detailing how previously excavated collections have been valued for exhibit, research and educational purposes.

Because context is of vital importance to archaeology, it is imperative that the definition of an archaeological collection include not just the artifacts and ecofacts recovered from an archaeological site but all associated and contributing data, including field notes and records, maps, soils and other samples retained for future investigations, photographic negatives, slides and digital image files related to the discovery, excavation and analysis of the site. Without all parts of the supporting documentation remaining together, archaeological remains risk losing their contextual identification, and therefore many of the associative values of the collection are diminished. Therefore the committee documented the presence/absence of contextual information in addition to collections of artifacts.

While the definition and application of value as proposed in this report is a fluid construct, the committee is in agreement that the associated values of an archaeological collection are greater when complete contextual data are present. Also, archaeological sites that have had extensive research and systematic excavation have the potential to hold greater value than those which have been subjected to less rigorous methods, lack contextual data, or have been compromised in some manner. To successfully work through our collections crisis the archaeological community will need to make difficult decisions about which of the sites that they curate hold the greatest potential to tell the story of Virginia's past. Therefore, we offer a framework by which these decisions could be facilitated in the future. Not all archaeological collections in our storage facilities are equal and the archaeological community needs to address this issue, or someone else will.

III. Survey Background

When COVA's Collections Committee initiated the Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia, they knew, as did many COVA members, that this idea was first discussed almost 20 years ago by the committee (then chaired by Beth Acuff and Keith Egloff). In the 1990s, Acuff conceived of the idea of creating a database with all of the site collections in Virginia, where they are located, and what time periods and themes they represent. At the most basic level, an inventory of this kind would provide organized and easily accessible collections location information, particularly important because while DHR is one centralized repository for archaeological collections, it is not the only one in the state. We also hope that by collecting these data we can be better prepared to successfully advocate for the continued support of archaeological collections. Additionally, just by attempting to collect this information, we stumbled across many shared problems and issues facing the proper care and stewardship of archaeological collections today that deserve attention.

The DHR guidelines *State Collections Management Standards* (DHR 2011), outlines the treatment and documentation for archaeological collections, specifically those being transferred to their facility in Richmond. These standards are consistent with 36 CFR Part 79 and provide an excellent outline of how to care for archaeological materials.

We sought the advice of experts in collections management to assist in the development and implementation of our survey including Dr. Terry Childs, Museum Program Manager at the

Department of the Interior and longtime COVA supporter. Dr. Childs has thought about and published on the management of archaeological collections at the federal level possibly more than anyone; therefore, we sought her input on our questionnaire and the relevance and importance of this initiative. She was very supportive and offered her help as we continued to pursue our goals.

We also solicited the Archeological Society of Virginia (ASV) for their support of this project to tap into their large network of professional and avocational archaeologists and archaeology supporters, in-depth knowledge of sites and associated collections, and commitment to preserving and learning about the Commonwealth's prehistoric and historic resources. Through consultation with archaeological collections management leaders, avocational supporters and by researching similar undertakings in other states (below), we were able to draw on other case studies to craft a survey that fit the unique needs of Virginia's tangible history.

IV. Collection Surveys – Other States

In addition to developing a statewide collections survey, we also conducted research on similar survey initiatives in other states. In summary, ours appears to be a fairly unique endeavor. This may be partly explained by the fact that some states, like Maryland, have a centralized system, which holds a majority of the archaeological collections called the Maryland Archaeological Conservation (MAC) Lab. "MAC Lab serves as a clearinghouse for archaeological collections recovered from land-based and underwater projects conducted by State and Federal agencies throughout Maryland. The MAC Lab also houses a number of major collections acquired through private donation to the Maryland Historical Trust" (Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum 2011). The MAC lab does not serve as the repository for 100% of Maryland's archaeological collections, at least one federal agency holds its archaeological collections as do various private museums and individuals, but the Lab has the potential to provide centralized, state-wide curation facilities.

States like Arizona have undertaken large-scale collections surveys, but unlike Virginia, their collections are housed in one of three main or four minor repositories. The goal of Arizona's survey was to make an assessment of the curation crisis in the state and offer recommendations for its alleviation (Lyons et al. 2006). In 1989, the state of Pennsylvania took a proactive measure to survey CRM firms and attempted to assess the volumetrics of collections and related documentation temporarily housed at these institutions but ultimately destined for the State Museum of Pennsylvania. This justified the museum's strict adherence "to its guidelines concerning types of storage containers, cataloguing, and record submissions for any C.R.M collections which it may receive in the future" (Kent 1989:23).

Washington State recently developed a plan similar to that proposed by Acuff in the 1990s to create:

"a new statewide database which will list the locations and status of all archaeological collections in Washington. It will also provide personnel to locate

those collections, and monitor current and future excavation projects to ensure that resulting collections are cared for using current curation standards, and that they are stored in institutions that will provide appropriate access to all interested citizens. Personnel would also act to mediate and assist in the resolution of current problematic curation issues” (Washington Archaeological Collections Management Project 2005).

Much like the state of Virginia, Washington’s archaeological collections are dispersed across space and among many disparate institutions. A Collections Database Work Group, comprised of archaeologists throughout the state, successfully sought funding for a two year position at the Office of Archaeology and Historical Preservation first from the Washington State Transportation Enhancement Grants program. The goal of this pilot project, called the On-line Research Collections Archaeology Map (ORCAMAP), is to create a centralized database for archaeology collections in Washington State. The product will be something very similar to Virginia’s DSS (Data Sharing System), but with the dataset being collections repositories as opposed to archaeological sites. Their initial phase of the pilot project is beginning with the Burke Museum’s collections data as a test case. Their rationale for this undertaking is compelling as they argue that cultural resource managers, practicing archaeologists and graduate students, tribes, museum collections managers, and curators could all benefit from a resource of this type (Burke Museum Archaeology 2011).

Closer to home and also similar to Virginia in terms of archaeological collections management strategies is New York. In the late 1980s, the state hoped to better assess “the nature of the sample of the archaeological record presently represented in curated collections” by undertaking a survey of collections at the New York State Museum (Sullivan 1992:5). This was an unknown for New York, much like Virginia, because of decentralized nature of archaeological collections. The survey of collections in the state museum showed that the repository did not have a representative sample of the archaeological record, either in thematic or temporal terms.

Sullivan (1992:9) suggested that plans for collections growth and management in New York needed to occur on the regional level with “archeological professional organizations working in conjunction with State Historic Preservation Offices” that “bring together the repositories and archaeologists having long-term research and collecting interests in specific regions” to facilitate effective coordinated regional planning. In other words, we can be the best stewards of the archaeological record by both ensuring its long term preservation, but also critically synthesizing and utilizing the collections to answer major questions about the past.

Additionally, the New York Archaeological Council (NYAC) conducted a statewide survey of potential archaeological repositories in 1988 and drafted a list of these as a “Guide to Anthropological Collections from New York State.” An attempt to update this list was undertaken in 2004 highlighting at least 73 institutions statewide that accept archaeological collections. The archaeological holdings of each of these institutions were entered into a database (Pipes and Morton 2004). NYAC is planning another updated survey this year (Marie-Lorraine Pipes, pers. com.).

V. Survey Methodology

Following consultations with collections experts and fellow COVA members, the Collections Committee developed a survey and accompanying cover letter (Appendices A and B) to be sent to 135 institutions in late September 2010 based on those listed in the Egloff Atlas of Virginia Archaeology (DHR 2012). This provided an excellent starting point in identifying smaller institutions that might own, curate, or exhibit archaeological collections or artifacts. The survey was also sent to ASV chapters, local governments with preservation programs, universities, CRM firms with offices in Virginia, and military installations. While we did not reach 100% of institutions that exhibit, curate, or own archaeological collections, we consider that the survey provides a representative sample of all the different types of institutions that do.

Our philosophy behind the survey form itself was to keep it simple with the intention of gleaning as much information as possible, without overburdening individual repositories. We specifically decided to focus on institutions located in the state rather than outside Virginia, and likewise to focus on collections from Virginia. We know that many of Virginia's archaeological collections, especially from earlier excavations, are housed outside the state. The survey was designed with a series of seven questions in regards to the presence of archaeological material, the existence of a collections policy, bases for accepting new collections, availability and frequency of use, publicizing of collections, collection importance, and a general inventory of archaeological material at the repository.

As of the following spring (2011), we only had a survey return rate of 33% which we did our best to increase through repeated email campaigns and targeted follow up phone calls. In some cases where we received no response, but we know definitively that the institution at least has archaeological collections, we recorded them as not responded, but a "yes" as to having archaeological collections. Generally speaking, our return rate was fairly high after this renewed effort, better than 60%, with a few glaring exceptions (including some COVA members who represent their institutions on a professional level).

The committee presented a Town Hall Meeting at the 2011 Mid Atlantic Archaeological Conference about archaeological collections and the survey. This was designed to publicize the survey and build momentum for our initiative. The conference session was well attended and there was a consensus among the various representatives from neighboring states that this conversation should continue at future conferences and could result in agreements on inventorying and shared protocols.

This was Phase One of our survey campaign. Phase Two began in February 2011 and entailed the surveying of archaeological site forms to better understand the level of recording and updating of collections-related information in the DHR's DSS. We embarked on this second survey phase in response to a question asked by a fellow archaeologist, "Why don't you just use the site survey forms to figure out where collections are located?" We suspected site forms are not recorded consistently or updated often enough to serve as a resource to locate collections. As detailed in Appendix D, our suspicions proved accurate.

To date, of the 95 counties in Virginia, we have collected information from 63. Counties were selected to represent the four archaeological regions of Virginia (Capital, Northern, Tidewater, and Western). Our strategy was to select 10 site forms representing all times periods (prehistoric and historic) and dates of site form submittal. From each form, we collected data on the site number, resource name, temporal designation, collection depository, field notes, field note depository, reports, report depository, photographic documentation, photograph depository, and most recent cultural management event. The results of the survey suggest that there could be up to four potential depositories for one archaeological collection but the validity of this suggestion has not been verified to date. This should provide a broad understanding of the level of information recorded on site forms and, as initial results suggested, offer a recommendation as to how the recording and updating of these details might be improved in the future. The report on the DSS survey is presented in Appendix D.

VI. Survey Results

Our survey reached at least 171 institutions in all parts of Virginia. Seven different institutional types own, curate, or exhibit archaeological collections: state agencies, universities, ASV chapters, federal agencies, local jurisdictions, CRM firms, and private individuals and organizations. Federal agencies included the U.S. Forest Service and military installations, primarily represented by the regional curation facility at Fort Lee, which houses federal, mainly Department of Defense collections (surveys were not systematically sent to the National Park Service); local jurisdictions included county and city archaeology programs, county and city museums and historical societies; state agencies included the DHR and state parks; private organizations included museums, foundations, and individuals. Most of the institutions surveyed were private organizations (Table 1).

Type of Repository	Count	Percent	Response Rate
State Agency	9	5%	67%
University	16	9%	69%
ASV Chapter	17	10%	29%
Federal Agency	20	12%	85%
Local Jurisdiction	26	15%	58%
CRM Firm	32	19%	56%
Private	51	30%	69%
TOTAL	171	100	

Table 1. Numbers of types of repositories surveyed and response rates for each type.

Out of the 171 institutions, 107 (63%) responded, 64 (37%) did not. Appendix C lists the respondents. We credit this high rate of survey return to our dogged Collections Committee members who individually contacted most of the people on the list. Of the 107 that responded, 75 (70%) reported that they have archaeological collections and 32 (30%) indicated that they did not (Table 2). Three institutions did not respond, but we are positive that they house collections and therefore this information was included in Table 2. What these data show is that a) archaeological collections are distributed in a wide variety of repository types but that b)

individual private organizations house the majority of collections. However, the range of archaeological collections curated by these institutions is large, between one and thousands.

The rest of the survey questions that could be answered with a “yes/no” response are summarized in Table 3. These responses are from institutions with archaeological collections. A surprising number of institutions do not have collections policies including one federal agency, one state agency, three local jurisdictions, five universities, and 10 private institutions. Out of the 78 institutions that have collections, 43 accept new collections and 12 do not. These data suggest that there are more active repositories than we assumed before this undertaking. Problematically, of those institutions that accept new collections, 10 do not have collections policies. Most of the places that have archaeological collections do make them available to researchers and/or the public. Of those whose collections are available to researchers or the public, an appointment is usually required. In breaking down the frequency with which collections are used, 12 said never, 20 said rarely (1 to 6 times a year), six said occasionally (once a month), and nine said frequently (daily or weekly).

Type of Repository	Number of Repositories with Archaeological Collections	Percent
ASV Chapter	1	1%
State Agency	4	5%
CRM Firm	6	8%
Federal Agency	9	12%
University	12	15%
Local Jurisdiction	14	18%
Private	32	41%
TOTAL	78	100%

Table 2. Repositories with archaeological collections.

Survey Question	Yes	No	No Response	Other	Total
Does your repository have a collections policy?	26	20	27	5 institutions reported "in progress"	78
Does your repository accept new collections?	43	12	22	1 uncertain	78
Are the collections available to the public or for research to others outside the institution?	51	5	22	Of those that specified, 32 are available only for research, and 18 are available for the public and research. 1 did not specify.	78

Table 3. Answers to yes/no survey questions from those that reported having collections.

Some of the respondents specified the circumstances in which they accept new collections: according to the collections policy; space and significance; derived from specific institutions or activities; associated with the institution; and case-by-case (Table 4).

Basis for Collections Acceptance	Count
according to collections policy	1
space and significance	2
derived from related institutions or activities	3
association with institution	16
case by case	16

Table 4. How do repositories accept new collections?

In terms of publicizing collections, though some institutions do not advertise, others get out the word on many fronts including exhibits, web sites, research and publications, events (like Archaeology Month), and public outreach (including Elder Hostels, school group tours, summer camps, etc.). Some are venturing into the world of social networking with Facebook, Twitter, and Wordpress.

Perhaps the most difficult question on the survey was number 6, “Which collections do you believe contribute to important research about Virginian history? Which collections do you highlight to donors, legislators, researchers, or the public? Please explain.” With this question, we hoped to elicit some discussion about what constitutes an important site. People answered this question in a variety of ways. Some highlighted specific site names and numbers, others approached the question thematically, still others commented upon the contributions of old collections to local or regional history. Thematically, answers covered all time periods from the earliest evidence of human occupation in Virginia through the 20th century. Plantation sites and African American history were oft-repeated, as was colonial urban development and culture contact. One response alluded to the “trend toward the reanalysis of older collections in American Archaeology” as being a measure of collection significance and concluded that the collections housed by their institution “will become even more prominent in the coming years as newer analytical technologies and research questions emerge.” A few admitted that they were unaware of the significance of their collection. As to the issue of significance, one person mentioned that “We feel every artifact has the potential to contribute to the history of the area” while others highlighted only those with strong research potential (meaning those with documentation, those that underwent full data recovery, or those from National Register eligible or listed sites). Only 15 institutions specifically addressed the second part of the question about highlighting collections and answers ranged from 1 collection to all. The most common answer was the collections that are highlighted depend on the audience a repository is trying to reach.

Finally, we asked repositories to provide an inventory of their collections that lists site number and name, site description, time period, number of boxes, presence of related documentation, ownership status, collections’ status, and additional comments. The data provided in response to this question is of varying levels of consistency, completeness, and quality. Clearly, some institutions have collections databases and inventories easily available, while many others (small and even some major repositories) could not provide even a list of collection names stored in their repository. This highlights a primary issue – it is very difficult to assess archaeology’s contributions towards Virginia’s history and beyond because we do not even know what has

been excavated, where site collections are located, who owns the collection, what supporting documentation is available, the condition of the artifacts and supporting documentation, what processing and analyses have occurred and what still could be accomplished. The fact that this question proved difficult for institutions of all types and sizes to answer is cause for major concern.

VII. Recommendations

This report details the fragmented nature which underlies the paradigm currently guiding the management of the Commonwealth's archaeological collections. From the most basic level of how an archaeological collection is defined to more theoretical discussions of value and significance, the report documents that there is much to be done within the professional community to ensure that the tangible remains of our archaeological research are preserved for the future. Our primary recommendation is that we need a paradigm shift that puts in the past our fragmented and ill-defined mindset towards collections and begins to view Virginia's archaeological collections as a collective whole, just as we do with our archaeological sites. In an ideal world, one document would exist from which state plans could be drafted, dissertations and thesis research could be inspired, and museum exhibits and other outreach programs could be developed. A document of this nature could be envisioned as a searchable, online database that not only recorded the collections that individual repositories house, but that also offered information on the potential uses of the collections to researchers, museum exhibitors or educators, and Master's or PhD students. In our current circumstances, none of this is possible on a statewide level. Though this may seem like a daunting, long-range goal, we have listed recommendations below that would help Virginia's archaeological community move in this direction.

-Maintenance of a Statewide Collections Inventory

This survey took many hours of work to compile and has resulted in an excel spreadsheet that lists valuable detail of the location and condition of archaeological collections throughout the state. We recommend that this inventory be continually updated and maintained by the Collections Committee as one of their primary duties. Eventually, it would be a major contribution on the part of COVA to put this inventory online, following the model currently being undertaken by Washington State.

-Collections Policy

One of the questions that was asked in the Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia concerned an institution's collections policy. A collections policy spells out the mission and goals for curating archaeological collections and provides a long-term framework for their care. It serves as a road map, not only for what to collect, but also details who has access to the collection and spells out the policy for inventories, processing materials, loans and research. A collections policy is a critical document which should be the foundation of a repository's procedures. The committee recommends that curation facilities should adopt a collections policy and the committee will discuss ways to provide models and help in crafting this document.

-Inventories (not artifact catalogues)

When the committee began the survey, we did not anticipate that this would be an arduous or difficult task. While we are overall very positive about the return rate for survey forms, we acknowledge that this exercise was challenging for many institutions. Some of these situations are discussed in this report, but the committee feels that an inventory of collections which are housed at a specific repository should be baseline data easily accessible and available. Knowing where specific archaeological collections are housed is important in continuing research, as well as for providing access to important archaeological remains for educational purposes or exhibits. An inventory of archaeological collections also provides a foundation for identifying items which may be lost or missing. The committee recommends that all repositories should make an effort to produce an inventory of the archaeological collections they house. This inventory should document site name and number in addition to which part of the archaeological collection they have – artifacts, field notes, photographs or reports, and the potential contribution of the site to research, exhibit or other functions. An inventory should also detail the status of each collection and if it needs tasks such as basic processing, cataloguing or additional research.

-Ownership and its place in a collections policy

Because archaeological collections have the potential to provide information about the past and because they possess many different values, not all of which can be known at this time, it is imperative that ownership of our archaeological collections be clear and documented. One of the issues that this report has uncovered is the uncertain ownership of many archaeological collections curated within the state at all types and sizes of repositories. Clear ownership of the artifacts and associated documentation and a plan for their long-term curation should be spelled out before excavation takes place. Likewise, facilities should not accept collections without clear ownership documentation. Repositories should work to clear title to their archaeological collections of their highest profile sites, so that issues do not arise when researchers, publishers or museums seek to use these artifacts.

-University-related recommendations

Another issue this survey details is the individualized nature of professors and graduate students conducting archaeological excavations at universities and colleges in Virginia. None of Virginia's universities have a centralized or departmental collections manager and it is unclear if any have a formal collections policy. Without a collections policy or centralized departmental manager, the collections generated through professor and graduate student excavations have the potential to become "orphaned" with the department upon the retirement or death of the archaeologist. This survey documented cases of "orphaned" archaeological collections at both William and Mary and Virginia Commonwealth University, and the committee is aware of additional examples. Virginia's academics should make every effort to ensure the long-term care of the collections under their responsibility. This includes making sure sites are reported, notes, maps and photographs are in order and digitized and that a repository is identified to provide access to and care for these data.

-Means to update DSS to reflect true repositories

The committee recommends that an effort should be made to update depository data on the DSS site forms, especially those that have had Phase III excavations. The jointly administered certification program could help in this endeavor because “updating” a site form is already an approved task for one of their requirements. The program could also incorporate this procedure as it develops more advanced requirements for certification graduates seeking additional training.

-Help for smaller institutions

Many of the survey respondents were historical societies and other smaller institutions, often with no professional archaeologist on staff. The people in this category repeatedly asked for assistance in managing, processing and making sense of their collections. The committee recommends that the professional archaeological community, and the certification committee, help these organizations in a variety of ways. One recommendation of this report is to assist with helping smaller institutions craft a collections policy to outline basic care and understanding about archaeological collections. The jointly administered certification committee could incorporate assistance to these smaller, non-archaeological repositories into future curricula that they write, especially for advanced certification work. The survey documents a clear need and desire for assistance from many of these institutions and it would be a shame for the archaeological community not to hear this plea.

-Others?

With this recommendation, we leave it up to you and your organization to think creatively about how the results of this report might inspire better curation and stewardship of the archaeological record. For example, consider applying for a Threatened Sites grant through DHR. This program has a precedent for funding projects from sites of statewide significance under threat not just in the excavation phase, but also for work with collections including cataloguing, rehousing, and analysis.

Two survey respondents offered examples of how this exercise had pushed them to think more critically about the treatment of our archaeological collections. In one instance, a professional archaeologist used the survey and inventory process as a means to begin advocating for a larger and more organized curation facility that would protect the various collections but also facilitate undergraduate research on those old collections. In another example, a professional archaeologist responded that the survey motivated him to develop a new undergraduate special topics course on Archaeological Collections Management that would educate future professionals on the challenges they will face in the future while simultaneously utilizing the man power of those enrolled to tackle some of the specific collections issues faced by that institution. We are encouraged by these creative steps and hope others will be, too.

VIII. Conclusion

“We are actively working on the collection at this time to catalogue over 1000 artifacts. Your advice on addressing the collections policy to accommodate archaeological collections would be very helpful. This survey is a very worthy effort.” (Collections survey respondent)

The Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia undertaken by COVA’s Collections Committee proved to be both enlightening as well as a worthwhile effort. We have begun to assemble an inventory of where archaeological collections are housed in the Commonwealth, but we also documented a number of issues that should be addressed in the future. While there are some gaps in the data collected, the overall response to the survey was extremely positive. The committee hopes that this exercise provides a better understanding of where archaeological collections are housed -- and who is using these materials, and that it provides some information that can be used by Virginia’s archaeologists.

Success Stories with Old Collections

We intend to end this report on a positive note that might inspire archaeologists and keepers of Virginia’s collections to think critically and creatively about all those artifacts in boxes. To that end, our state has made strides with collections in the realm of education, exhibition and research that deserve highlighting.

-Educational Value – African American Archaeological Research Kits (ARKs)

In the early 2000s, COVA’s Public Education Committee created African American Archaeological Research Kits (ARKs) organized around three actual archaeological sites in Virginia. The ARKs are checked out and used as resources by teachers, museum educators and other educators. Each ARK contains reproductions of artifacts found at the archaeological sites; artifact identification flash cards; maps and site plans; a card game based on foodways; and explanatory material on each site. The committee members accessed the collections of these three previously excavated archaeological sites, traveling to the repositories and viewing the artifacts and associated data and photographs to craft these educational kits.

-Research Value – Radiocarbon Dating

Virginia’s curated collections may prove a useful place to obtain radiocarbon assays from undated sites, or sites with problematic dates. A COVA-sponsored survey of existing radiocarbon assays uncovered numerous issues with previously obtained dates from sites in Virginia (Means and McKnight 2009, 2010). Three basic problems were revealed for many radiocarbon assays from Virginia sites:

1. Inattention to materials selected for dating;
2. Incomplete or improper reporting of dating results; and,
3. Difficulties in determining what materials are actually associated with a given radiocarbon assay.

Because of these issues, recorded radiocarbon assays from sites in Virginia often cannot be assessed as to their validity. Partly for this reason, new radiocarbon assays are necessary from

discrete contexts at sites even if they already have been subject to radiocarbon dating. Other sites that were not dated in the past may have curated organic remains suitable for radiocarbon dating—especially through accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating.

Even if individual radiocarbon assays from a site are valid, many Virginia sites have insufficient radiocarbon assays. Unfortunately, many archaeologists once viewed a single radiocarbon assay from a site as being sufficient for determining the age of that site. This is simply not the case. Ideally, a minimum of three samples should be submitted from each discrete site component to ensure that the dates obtained were not anomalous. If two dates are obtained from a discrete context, and they happen to differ, one cannot know which date is correct. With at least three dates, the researcher can more readily assess which dates are valid (Means 2005). For some sites, additional organic remains are available in curated collections. This is especially true for sites that are inaccessible today or have been destroyed since their original excavations.

Archaeological collections holding material from Virginia sites could and should be thoroughly examined for organic samples suitable for radiocarbon dating (McKnight and Gallivan 2007; Means and McKnight 2010). The chronological framework for Virginia's past could then be considerably strengthened. Simply put, there are currently insufficient radiocarbon assays from secure and discrete contexts from many sites in Virginia.

-Interpretation and Exhibit Value -- Yorktown Victory Center

An extensive and unusual collection of artifacts held by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources is the basis for a 'flagship' exhibition at Yorktown Victory Center, a Commonwealth museum at the eastern end of the Colonial Parkway dedicated to telling the stories of the Revolutionary War period in Virginia. Following a survey of vessels lost or scuttled in the York River, a well-preserved British vessel (44YO0088) sunk during the 1781 siege of Yorktown was excavated. The Yorktown Shipwreck Archaeological Project used a cofferdam and filtering system to enable this eight-year excavation, begun in 1982, to retrieve artifacts preserved underwater for two centuries. Special techniques and great care were needed to preserve and house these once waterlogged objects.

Yorktown's Sunken Fleet is an ongoing exhibit that features artifacts from the *Betsy*, a collier converted to troop transport and supply ship. Vessel components and furnishings, tools and equipment used on board, and personal items of the officers and crew are displayed and interpreted. These range from barrel parts to dining utensils and include regimental buttons that led to discovering the identity of the ship. This loan of over 300 artifacts from the Department of Historic Resources provides insight into daily life and work at sea during the Revolution. Recent admission figures indicate that well over 100,000 visitors per year have experienced the striking recreation on shipboard life made possible through the creative use of this curated archaeological collection.

-Research Value -- Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery

The highly ambitious project called DAACS, the Digital Archive of Comparative Slavery, offers an excellent example of how archaeologists have posed new questions to and gleaned new

information from old collections. Begun in 2000, the goal of DAACS is to establish a relational, online database that could facilitate comparative research on slave-related sites from the Chesapeake and throughout the Atlantic World. One of the sites was excavated as early as 1957, but the majority of these old collections date since the 1970s. If we consider the developments in the history and theory of African American archaeology even as recently as the 1990s, our ability to compare artifact assemblages and spatial distributions of so many Virginia slave sites is exciting and our products unlimited. In their first phase of the project, the grant-funded archaeologists targeted slave-related collections that had been well and extensively excavated and that possessed all components of a complete archaeological collection: artifacts, excavation records, and images. This systematic re-analysis of 20 sites from 10 different plantations has spurred on conference papers, theses, and dissertations without even picking up a shovel. Moreover, our archaeological understanding of the development and dimensions of slavery in Virginia has and will continue to grow. Imagine if this were true with other big picture questions of history and prehistory.

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APPENDIX A. Survey Cover Letter

I am writing on behalf of the Council of Virginia Archaeologists (COVA) Collections Committee. As you may know, we are an organization of professional archaeologists founded in 1975 dedicated to the preservation and study of Virginia's archaeological resources. We have recently embarked on a survey of archaeological collections on a statewide basis. We need your help to make this survey successful!

Attached you will find a Collections Survey questionnaire. We have targeted your organization as one that might own, temporarily exhibit, or curate archaeological collections and we would like to know additional information about what your institution holds. The purpose of this assessment is threefold:

- 1) On a basic level, we would like assess how many archaeological collections are housed in the state. Understanding the size and scope of the archaeological collections database will aid in future coordinated regional planning and management of Virginia's archaeological resources.
- 2) With your input, we would like to draft and make readily available complementary collections management policies or best practices among repositories in the region.
- 3) Finally, because repositories like yours are full of exciting and informative artifacts, photographs, and field records, we would like to develop a list that highlights the research potential of this material. What themes of research do your collections contribute towards? What collections have the potential to expand our understanding of Virginia's unique and rich past? This list would help historic preservationists, historians, collections managers, archaeologists, and other museum professionals communicate the importance and highlight the non-renewable nature of archaeological collections to the public and stimulate future research by scholars.

Please help us reach our goal of amassing an inventory of archaeological collections in Virginia! We understand that the questionnaire will require some time and effort on your part, but we hope that you will see the merit in this endeavor. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to sharing our results with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Esther White and Eleanor Breen, Co-Chairs
COVA Collections Committee

APPENDIX B. Survey Questionnaire

COLLECTIONS SURVEY
Council of Virginia Archaeologists

Thank you for your help! Please return to:

Esther White
ewhite@mountvernon.org
Historic Mount Vernon
PO Box 110
Mount Vernon, VA 22121

Repository Name: _____
Contact Person: _____
Email Address: _____
Mailing Address: _____
Phone Number: _____

1. Does your institution currently have archaeological material in your collections?

_____ Yes _____ No

2. Do you have a collections policy? Please attach.

3. Do you accept new collections? On what basis?

4. Are these collections available to the public or for research by others outside your institution?

At all times _____ By appointment _____ Not at all _____

If yes, how often are they utilized? _____

5. How do you publicize your collections? Online? Exhibits? Public Outreach? Publications?

6. Which of the collections, in your opinion, have the potential to contribute to important research on Virginia's history? Which collections would you (or do you) highlight to donors, legislators, researchers, or the public? Please explain.

APPENDIX C. Collections Survey Respondents

Repository Name
AECOM
Alexandria Archaeology Museum
Anthony A. Burke
Archaeological and Cultural Solutions, Inc.
ASV, COL Howard MacCord
ASV, Northern Virginia
ASV, Patrick Henry
ASV, Upper James River
Avoca Museum
Bassett History Center
Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia
Browning & Associates, Ltd.
Cape Charles Museum and Welcome Center
Carlyle House Historic Park
Chesterfield Museum Complex
Circa Cultural Resource Management, LLC
College of William and Mary
College of William and Mary
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Cultural Resources Analysts, Inc. (CRAI)
Dahlgren Naval Surface Warfare Center
DATA Investigations, LLC
Dutton + Associates
Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society (ESVHS) / Ker Place
Fairfax County Park Authority
Fairfield Foundation
Fort AP Hill
Fort Belvoir
Fort Eustis
Fort Lee
Fort Monroe
Fort Myer-Henderson Hall
Fort Story
Gadsby's Tavern Museum
George Mason University
George Washington Foundation, Ferry Farm
George Washington's Birthplace National Monument
George Washington's Office Museum
Glencoe Museum
Gloucester County
Gunston Hall Plantation
Halifax County Historical Society
HDR, Inc.
Historic Christ Church Foundation
Historic Hopewell Foundation Inc (HHFI)

Historic Mount Vernon
Historic Services Department, City of Newport News
Historic Smithfield Plantation
Isle of Wight County Museum
James Madison University
James River Institute, JRIA
Jamestown Rediscovery Preservation Virginia
Jamestown Settlement
John Milner Associates, Inc.
Langley Air Force Base
Loudoun County
Louis Berger Group, Inc., The
Lynchburg Museum System
MacCallum More Museum & Gardens
Madison County Historical Society/Madison Arcade
Manassas Museum System
Mariners' Museum
Mary Ball Washington Museum & Library
Mattaponi Indian Museum
Menokin Foundation
Monticello
Monticello/Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery
Montpelier Foundation
Museum of Culpeper History
Newton History Center of The Stone House Foundation
Norfolk District of the Army Corp of Engineers
Occoneechee State Park and Visitor's Center
Old Jail Museum
Pamplin Historical Park and National Museum
Pamunkey Indian Museum
Petersburg National Battlefield
Point of Honor (see LYNCHBURG MUSEUM)
Quantico
Radford University Forensic Science Institute
Red Hill
RK&K Engineers
Rosewell Foundation
Rummel, Klepper & Kahl, LLP (RK&K)
Salem Museum & Historical Society
Southeastern Archaeological Research, Inc. (SEARCH)
Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park
Staunton River Battlefield State Park
Stratford Hall Plantation
Sweet Briar College
Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest
Thunderbird Archaeology
University of Kentucky
University of Virginia Library Harrison Institute of American History, Literature, and Culture

USDA Forest Service-George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
Versar, Inc. (Cultural Resources Division)
Virginia Archaeological Resource Center of the ASV/Kittewan
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
Virginia Institute for Marine Science (VIMS)
Virginia National Guard Artifact Curation Facility/Fort Pickett
Virginia State Parks
Washington and Lee University
Wilderness Road Regional Museum
William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research
Wilton House Museum
Yorktown Victory Center

APPENDIX D. The DSS Survey of Depository Data

As part of COVA's Collections Committee's Survey of Archaeological Repositories in Virginia, a random sample of the site files was conducted to see how collections data are recorded. As noted above, one of the initial responses was that the survey questions, specifically where archaeological collections were housed, could be answered through the DHR's site files. As the survey data began to be compiled, the committee also felt the site files could help address some additional questions concerning the nature of cultural resource management (CRM) firms' curation of artifacts as well as the underlying issue of what items are defined as part of an archaeological collection. Specific recommendations arising out of the DSS survey are listed in this section rather than at the end of this report.

Site files in the Commonwealth of Virginia's DSS are housed and administered by the DHR. The files are organized based upon four geographical regions: capital, northern, tidewater and western. A total of 63 counties were surveyed: 27 counties were sampled from the capital region; 12 counties were reviewed from the other three regions. All survey was done using the online DSS data; no paper records, housed at the DHR facility have been examined. Ten archaeological sites were chosen from each county to assess the nature of their collection reporting. There was an attempt to include sites recorded during various decades that site files have been in existence (roughly the 1960s – present). Eleven sites were sampled from Surrey and Montgomery counties. Collections information was compiled from 632 archaeological sites. Table 5 lists the counties surveyed for each region.

Overall Recording Issues. The DSS site files record four specific aspects of an archaeological collection: artifact / specimens, field notes, reports and photographic documentation. The survey of 632 sites compiled data regarding these categories and each will be discussed below (Tables 6 and 7).

Approximately half (n = 321) of the site files surveyed did not list a depository for the artifact collection. Many of these are from sites that were recorded prior to 1990. This random sample suggests that more than half of the site files completed prior to the 1990s failed to list depository details for artifacts, the most basic part of an archaeological collection. The ratios are better for sites recorded during the previous two decades with more than half of the artifact depositories recorded for the 1990s and almost 75% of the depositories listed on site forms filled out during the 2000s.

The other three depository categories are even less complete on the DSS site forms. The depository for reports is not listed on 40% of the sampled forms; field notes are not recorded on 61% of the sampled forms; and photographs are not recorded on 71% of the forms. This is probably a reflection of several separate issues.

Incomplete site forms are not a surprising finding and archaeologists have discussed this issue at length throughout the years at both COVA meetings and in conference papers. It is a positive step that the more recent site forms appear to be more complete.

Region	County	Region	County
Capital	Albemarle	Tidewater	Isle of Wight
Capital	Amelia	Tidewater	James City
Capital	Amherst	Tidewater	Mathews
Capital	Appamattox	Tidewater	Middlesex
Capital	Brunswick	Tidewater	Northumberland
Capital	Buckingham	Tidewater	Richmond
Capital	Campbell	Tidewater	Southampton
Capital	Caroline	Tidewater	Surry
Capital	Charles City	Tidewater	Westmoreland
Capital	Charlotte	Western	Bedford
Capital	Chesterfield	Western	Bland
Capital	Cumberland	Western	Botetourt
Capital	Dinwiddie	Western	Buchanan
Capital	Fluvanna	Western	Carroll
Capital	Goochland	Western	Lee
Capital	Greene	Western	Montgomery
Capital	Halifax	Western	Pulaski
Capital	Hanover	Western	Russell
Capital	Henrico	Western	Scott
Capital	Louisa	Western	Washington
Capital	Lunenburg	Western	Wythe
Capital	Mecklenburg		
Capital	Nelson		
Capital	New Kent		
Capital	Nottoway		
Capital	Powhatan		
Capital	Prince Edward		
Northern	Arlington		
Northern	Bath		
Northern	Fairfax		
Northern	Fauquier		
Northern	Highland		
Northern	King George		
Northern	Loudoun		
Northern	Madison		
Northern	Orange		
Northern	Prince William		
Northern	Shenandoah		
Northern	Warren		
Tidewater	Accomack		
Tidewater	Gloucester		
Tidewater	Greenville		

Table 5. Counties included in the DSS collections survey

Artifact Depository. According to the DSS site forms sampled for this report, most artifact collections are deposited at CRM firms (n = 115). This number is troubling for several reasons. The separate survey of CRM firms recorded that many firms operating in the Commonwealth categorically state that they “do not curate artifacts permanently.” The DSS site files occasionally support that statement, yet CRM firms which claim not to curate artifacts are routinely listed as the depository on the site form. **The committee suggests that DHR should review the wording on the site form, for all depository questions, to ensure it is clear and leaves minimal room for ambiguity. Additionally, if CRM firms are acting as a “pass-through” or temporary depository while the report is being written then this should be recorded on the DSS form and the final or permanent depository should also be listed.** The site form ideally acts as the permanent record for both the archaeological site as well as the supporting data and this could easily be better reflected within the DSS files.

Also troubling, are several instances of artifact collections deposited with CRM firms that are no longer in business. Perhaps the most numerous of these examples are public universities which previously operated a CRM arm. These collections are likely still housed at the universities, but when a business fails its assets are often scattered.

Several smaller CRM firms act as the depository for artifacts they collect, often because the type of projects that they undertake are not subject to the requirements or recommendations regarding artifact depositories that often accompany cultural resource management work. **The committee recommends that these companies make plans for the artifact collections that they curate when their companies cease operation.**

Field Note Depository. The majority of the site forms surveyed do not record any data about field notes (61%). When field notes are recorded as part of the site’s collection, CRM firms are the overwhelming depository (20%). Most of these are instances where the collection is also housed with a CRM firm and in only a small number of cases do the site files record separate depositories for artifacts and field notes. It is thought that this is due to the personal nature of field notes and that they are not routinely defined as an integral component of a site’s collection. **The committee recommends that when artifacts are transferred originals or copies of all field notes accompany the collection.**

Report Depository. It is assumed that many sites which are registered in the DSS system do not have a formal report written for them. The site forms suggest this is the case, although 40% of the surveyed sites have this field left blank, which seems like a high number.

Of site files that list report depository, the majority (21%) list the DHR as the report depository. **For those sites that are documented in a report, the committee recommends that copies of the report be sent to the DHR and if no report is written this is recorded as such on the site form.**

Photograph Depository. Photographic documentation emerges from the survey of DSS site files as the least recorded field with more than 70% of the surveyed forms recording no information in the photograph depository column. It is understood that some sites are probably not photographed as part of the process of recording the site. However, the high percentage of sites

without any information about photographs leads the committee to believe that this is not being filled out in some cases. **The committee recommends that when artifacts are transferred originals or copies of all photographic documentation should accompany the collection.**

Summary. A survey of 632 archaeological site forms from 63 Virginia counties was conducted from the DSS system as part of the larger COVA's Collections Committee Survey of Archaeological Collections in Virginia. This survey discovered that the four collections depository categories (artifact, field notes, report and photographs) are not routinely filled out and that the level of recordation improves with the more recent site forms. Additionally, the survey discovered that forms were consistently being filled out using "temporary" or interim depository details rather than with permanent curation facilities. Because of these issues, the DSS site files are not a reliable source of detail about where archaeological collections are curated or a complete record of the curation of Virginia's archaeological collections.

	Private	DHR	Other State Agency	Another State	Local Jurisdiction	University	Federal Agency	CRM Firm	Depository Not Listed	None Collected	Publication/ Thesis
Artifact Depository	45	92.5	2	6	3.5	10	26	115	321	11	
Field Note Depository	10.5	42.8	4.83	6	4.5	13	35.5	125.83	2	387	
Report Depository	8	130	4.83	7	5.84	4.5	21.5	88.67	99	252	10.5
Photograph Depository	10	42.5	6	4.5	1.5	8.5	12	70	30	447	

Table 6. Results of DSS survey by count.

	Private	DHR	Other State Agency	Another State	Local Jurisdiction	University	Federal Agency	CRM Firm	Depository Not Listed	None Collected	Publication/ Thesis
Artifact Depository	7	15	0.32	1	1	2	4	18	51	2	0
Field Note Depository	2	7	1	1	1	2	6	20	0.32	61	0
Report Depository	1	21	1	1	1	1	3	14	16	40	2
Photograph Depository	2	7	1	1	0.24	1	2	11	5	71	0

Table 7. Results of DSS survey by percent.