

# Editorial

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This theme issue of *Advances in Archaeological Practice*, guest edited by Bonnie Pitblado, Bryon Schroeder, Matthew J. Rowe, Suzie Thomas, and Anna Wessman, is titled Professional-Collector Collaboration: Moving beyond Debate to Best Practice.

This volume of *Advances* addresses issues of ethical practices in archaeology, centered around the relationships between collectors and professional archaeologists in the United States. Here, the collectors are specifically those who are responsible and responsive stewards (RRSs) of archaeology, as put forth in a 2018 [Society for American Archaeology \(SAA\) Statement](#). Aspects of practice that are discussed in this series of articles include how professionals and RRSs work together and with descendant communities; if and how legacy and modern collections serve research; and issues around the possession, curation, and repatriation of collections. Some authors describe their encounters with legacy collections from contexts that violated ancestral remains, including the legally and personally challenging work to repatriate them.

The term “collectors” is broader than the RRSs with whom the authors work in this volume, and it can include people who collect legally or illegally. Consequently, the authors describe those with whom they worked and the relationships of those individuals to the collections that they hold. Assessing the creation of a collection is, perhaps, more complicated in the United States than in many other countries because of the government’s role in managing the past as property and the fact that there are different laws for federal, tribal, state, and local jurisdictions. Today, it is legal for people in the United States to possess nonmortuary collections from private land with permission from the landowner. Legacy collections from public lands may also be legal depending on when and in what state they were made.

Five primary federal laws that regulate the practice of archaeology in the United States also affect our understanding of collections and collectors. The first of these is the Antiquities Act of 1906, which recognized the value and necessity of protecting archaeological sites and which stipulated that only qualified and permitted institutions can examine and excavate sites on federal lands. This law creates a distinction between those who work under permits and those who do not.

Additional protections for archaeological sites increased in the mid-twentieth century with the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966 and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 prohibited removal of artifacts from federal or Indian lands without permission. The Native American Graves

Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 and state burial laws were enacted in the latter part of the twentieth century, creating a process for the identification and removal of ancestral remains on governmental lands. They offer some protections for human remains exposed on private land as well.

Through these acts, the federal government increasingly took responsibility for the preservation of archaeological sites and materials found on federal land or impacted by work conducted with federal funds (or more aptly, it took responsibility for preserving the archaeological knowledge that could be gained from these sites). The associated implementing regulations have their own colonial framework and challenges, but the federal process has created some valued protections for both sites and collections. Work on federal and other types of public lands requires tribal comment through consultation about the effort and, potentially, the project interpretations. It also promotes repository agreements that ensure that resulting collections are cared for respectfully in ways that are important to both the discipline and descendant communities and that they will not be bought or sold.

For both professionals and collectors, privately funded or voluntary work on private land lacks some of the systemic protections created by the current processes used to manage cultural resources in the United States. Professionals navigate this through their engagement with ethical practices. RRSs will likely need the relationships with professionals, like those described in this issue, to obtain any necessary education and assistance.

When Pitblado, Schroeder, Rowe, Thomas, and Wessman offered *Advances* a proposal for this theme issue, the conversation sparked by the Editorial Board showed us the complex values this topic raised, including the concerns of descendant communities about collectors and collections, and the risks of collections held outside of repositories. This issue is a good fit for *Advances* because these are discussions that need to be had, and they focus on practice.

Both authors and peer reviewers pointed out that ignoring RRSs means that we are also ignoring a substantial portion of the archaeological record, an important understanding of our profession and our enduring responsibilities, alliances with people who can be good stewards, and the potential to resolve what we see as problematic. One peer reviewer, commenting on the history of archaeology in Oregon, reminded us that collectors were once seen as valuable partners to professional archaeologists. In the mid-twentieth century, during periods of massive development, avocationalists would enhance projects that were essentially salvage efforts, particularly on large infrastructure developments,

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such as dam construction. There was no way that archaeologists could mobilize to meet the needs on that scale. As our profession has grown and anthropology/archaeology programs now provide training for students across the country at all levels, agencies are also staffed with environmental professionals trained in “process,” and many projects are well planned without the need for “rescue.” With this professionalization, the value of avocationalists (and RRSs as a subset of that group) has changed or been forgotten.

The authors of these articles value professional and RRS collaborations, and they show how people around the country are navigating the concerns raised about collections that are privately made and held and that are variably documented. Some authors have worked with descendant communities, and others are working to curate collections in repositories to ensure their preservation in perpetuity. All authors talk about the value of the collections made by people with long-term connections to the landscape—those who collect from their own or from neighbors’ fields or ranchlands, for example. Authors are typically showcasing this work through the frame of a specific project, and this issue includes case studies of work done for bachelor’s and master’s theses or doctoral dissertations. Not every article or project can address all the challenges raised by working with collections. In assessing their experiences, authors provide guidance for others, and the authors of ongoing projects consider their own next steps in bettering practice.

Peer reviewers were asked our standard questions about manuscript significance and presentation, and whether the manuscript takeaways constitute best practice for archaeology. We, the *Advances* editors, asked them to consider the ways the authors wrote about the legal and ethical context of their work, and we noted that the articles were going to focus on work with RRSs. We invited peer reviewers from multiple backgrounds. For each article, we tried to have reviewers who had worked in the region and who therefore knew the legal context of work; who had worked with (or who was) a RRS or prioritized public engagement in their work; and who could offer an Indigenous point of view. For some authors, this meant that they received widely divergent reviews in terms of perspective and with respect to recommendations about the publication potential of their article. When needed, the authors rebalanced their presentations during the revision

process, and the articles were sent back for further review. We thank the many authors who graciously rose to meet the challenges of this process. We are grateful for the knowledge, commitment to good practice, and the professional grounding that 37 peer reviewers brought to this project.

The issues raised by the guest editors, authors, and peer reviewers do need continuing consideration, and we ask that their effort become a basis for future work. The ways that archaeologists relate to those outside the profession is necessarily changing. Many archaeologists today recognize the power differentials in our scholarship and practice as we consider when and how we can open authority. We recognize that we need others who also hold value and knowledge about the past to contribute to our work. In this issue of the journal, authors privilege the relationships that they have built with RRSs in the United States with their access to privately held—often rural—land and to some selected portion of the material culture on those landscapes. And so with the practices described by these authors, are there ways that we can make our relationships less dyadic—archaeologist–collector, archaeologist–tribal community—so that descendant community comments and concerns about collections and collecting are shared beyond consultation? This asks archaeologists for a commitment to communication and education. And, given that archaeology is and has always been heavily reliant on volunteerism inside and outside the profession, how else can we engage these RRSs in ways that do not encourage the creation of new, private collections?

More specifically, the SAA statement about RRSs provides an important way to center the articles in this issue. Published in 2018, it was based on three years of committee work. Like the current [SAA Principles of Archaeological Ethics](#), it prioritizes the archaeological record more than the larger responsibilities of knowledge creation. As the SAA currently works toward new ethical guidance through a series of task force initiatives, perhaps this statement can be included in that broader reevaluation.

We hope that the efforts of all those who volunteered their time and invested in these articles provide a basis for informed and respectful debates about how our professional values extend beyond our professional boundaries.