

# Co-Creation as a Twenty-First Century Archaeology Museum Practice

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## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

This paper addresses two specific problems of archaeological practice at the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa (CHNM). First, the CHNM faced fiduciary, ethical, and methodological best practice responsibilities for a 50-year accumulation of archaeological materials and their associated records curated at the facility. The second problem focused on the CHNM's responsibility as an institution to serve and be responsive to the public who ultimately own and fund the facility. Besides legal considerations, the responsibilities flow from the CHNM's mission "to protect and interpret the Chucalissa archaeological site's cultural and natural environments, and to provide the University Community and the public with exceptional educational, participatory, and research opportunities" (C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa 2015). As a museum, the CHNM exists to serve the visiting public. Without public visitation, the CHNM would exist only as a repository for archaeological collections or a research facility. Therefore, the CHNM staff prioritized collections-based

projects that provided the public with educational, participatory, and research opportunities.

The CHNM staff sought innovative solutions through activities that addressed both problem areas: cultural materials and public engagement. Staff employed a co-creative approach in which the CHNM partnered with the public in designing and implementing those solutions. The processes also incorporated the expressed needs of the public. In so doing, the CHNM prioritized activities in which the multiple "publics" of students, volunteers, and community service learners were engaged in collections-based projects.

## BACKGROUND TO THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Chucalissa is a Mississippian culture (A.D. 1000–1500) temple mound complex, located in the southwest corner of Memphis, Tennessee. The site was "discovered" in the 1930s by a Jim

## ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates attempts over the past seven years to address two archaeological challenges at the C.H. Nash Museum at Chucalissa. The first challenge was the proper curation of 50 years of accumulated collections from a wide array of sources by a staff one-third the size of when the collections were acquired. Second, the Museum faced the challenge of becoming a viable and socially relevant public institution in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, the C.H. Nash Museum embraced a co-creative approach to face the challenges. Co-creative processes resulted in a renewed and expanded base for public engagement, allowing the Museum to maximize the potential for preservation, research accessibility, and the exhibition of cultural materials curated at the institution.

Este documento evalúa los intentos en los últimos siete años para hacer frente a dos retos arqueológicos en el museo C.H. Nash de Chucalissa. El primer reto era el inventario adecuado de las colecciones procedentes de una amplia gama de fuentes que se acumularon durante más de 50 años por un tercio del personal que había cuando se adquirieron estas colecciones. Segundo, el museo se enfrentó al reto de convertirse en una institución pública viable y sostenible para el siglo 21. Finalmente, el museo C.H. Nash adoptó un modelo de creación en colaboración para enfrentar los retos. Sobre la base de esa experiencia, los procesos de creación en colaboración sentaron las bases para la participación pública extensa y renovada con las partes interesadas, llevando al museo por el camino del futuro sostenible.

Crow-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) project to construct a segregated park, known then as the Shelby Bluff State Park for Negroes, for the African-American community of Memphis. When the CCC encountered evidence of the prehistoric occupation, the area identified as containing the rich Native American deposits was removed from the park development. In 1956, a museum was opened to provide greater public access to the prehistoric site. In 1962, the University of Memphis (UM) (then Memphis State University) assumed administrative responsibility for the site and museum.

Through the 1990s, the CHNM amassed a sizable collection of both prehistoric and historic archaeological collections. The collections resulted from several sources. First, the CHNM ultimately became the repository for all collections excavated by archaeologists employed by the UM. Second, the CHNM curated materials generated through cultural resource management projects conducted either by Museum personnel or other archaeologists in the Midsouth. Third, through the 1980s, Chucalissa accepted cultural materials donated by avocational archaeologists and the general public.

Like all museums, with the advent of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the CHNM faced the task of completing an inventory of all curated collections. For the materials excavated at the Chucalissa archaeological site, NAGPRA compliance was not difficult. Archaeologists who conducted field research at Chucalissa maintained detailed and meticulous records. For the curated materials excavated through cultural resource management projects, regional excavations by academic institutions, and donated collections, the quality and completeness of the available associated records were inconsistent. From the 1990s through 2007, the CHNM staff attempted to inventory the poorly documented components of the non-Chucalissa site collections.

In 2007, responsibility for curating all UM archaeological collections was formally transferred to the CHNM, effectively doubling the size of the Museum's collections.<sup>1</sup> The transferred materials were not inventoried or accessioned and resulted from UM staff research over a 40-year period. With the transfer, the CHNM initiated a re-inventory of all curated cultural materials. To assure compliance with all fiduciary responsibilities, the CHNM adopted a collections management policy that specified the best practices for the curation and preservation of all cultural materials and the public use and accessibility of the materials and prioritized the curation of materials from West Tennessee. The West Tennessee scope of the newly adopted collections management policy led to the deaccessioning and transfer of curated collections from sites in neighboring states (e.g., Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Missouri) back to those states. As well, collections with no provenience information were deaccessioned for use in educational projects. At this writing (2015), the re-inventory, deaccession, and transfer project is 95 percent complete.

In 2007, the CHNM faced two substantive logistical problems upon assuming responsibility for the collections. First, portions of the collections required considerable attention for curation by best practice standards. However, in 2007 the CHNM no longer employed a collections manager, and the staff size was reduced

by two-thirds from the time when the collections were acquired. UM resources were not available to hire replacement personnel.

In 2008, the CHNM launched a volunteer program to assist in the collections tasks. The volunteer program was successful, grew beyond collections projects, and adopted participatory (Connolly and Tate 2011) and third-place perspectives (Tate 2012). With that experience the CHNM expanded the participatory framework of the collections programs to include community outreach into Southwest Memphis (Connolly et al. 2012; Connolly and Rea 2015) and, most recently, to international collaboration (Connolly et al. 2015).

## THE PARTICIPATORY, CO-CREATIVE APPROACH

In structuring volunteer activity, the CHNM adopted a framework of three project types developed by Simon (2010:187–191) that draw on a citizen science model. First, contributory volunteers have limited input on the direction of a project that remains controlled by the institution. Second, in collaborative projects, volunteers have more latitude in their tasks and serve as active partners in processes that originate and remain under the control of the sponsoring institution. Finally, in co-creative projects, both the volunteer and the institution are responsible for defining and creating the project goals. This paper focuses on co-creative projects. Simon (2010:187) elaborates that the purpose of co-creative projects is "to give voice and be responsive to the needs and interests of local community members; to provide a place for community engagement and dialogue; and to help participants develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals."

In this paper, I use the term "co-creation" specifically to prioritize acting on the public's expressed needs and interests. Co-creation is the essence of the civic engagement envisioned over one decade ago in *Mastering Civic Engagement*, the seminal publication of the American Association (now Alliance) of Museums, in which Hirzy (2002:16) wrote that "[w]orking together or diversifying audiences is not enough. What is needed are reciprocal, co-created relationships that connect the assets and purposes of organizations."

Co-creation aligns with Chambers's (2004:194) assertion that applied archaeology is not simply a means to create knowledge, but also serves to engage communities to make decisions about the preservation and presentation of their cultural heritage resources. Such an understanding of applied archaeology means a practice with and not for the public. Merriman (2004:6–11) notes that such an approach moves practice from a deficit model in which the public needs proper education in archaeology to a practice that establishes a conversation between the archaeologist and public about cultural heritage resources. Merriman also notes that implicit in this understanding is a constructivist approach in which people relate archaeological meaning to their own lives, less so than to current archaeological trends. In this way, co-creation also aligns with Carol McDavid's (2003:57) discussion on "de-centering" the authority of the archaeologist in project direction.

Below, this paper reports two such co-creative case studies and sets them within the context of collection management tasks and the mission of the CHNM. The two case studies involve different publics, collection types, and archaeological practices. In addition, the two case studies demonstrate the range of possibilities in co-creative projects. The two studies use materials excavated from a 1920s-era African-American farmstead, the Big Hackberry Site (40SY607) located on the present-day grounds of the Chucalissa site and the Fred Jobe site (40LN195 and 40LN196), located in Lincoln County, Tennessee.

## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE C.H. NASH MUSEUM AT CHUCALISSA AND THE BIG HACKBERRY SITE

From their inception in 1956, the Chucalissa Museum (now the C.H. Nash Museum) and site complex created an oasis of white privilege in the heart of the African-American community of Southwest Memphis. African-Americans were not permitted into the segregated museum complex, and the Native American presence was limited to employment as interpreters or actors on a stage directed by a white staff (Connolly 2011). Even after formal segregation policies were overturned in 1959, the surrounding communities, whose residents today are 95 percent African American, remained alienated from the CHNM complex.

In 2007, the UM, and by extension Chucalissa, had an unfavorable reputation in Southwest Memphis. Area residents were concerned about unemployment rates, the stench from the sewage treatment plant, environmental code violations, and crime rates. University interests in the area were perceived by residents to be irrelevant research from which faculty gained prestige and grant funds but the community gained little or nothing in return. As one resident stated at a 2008 community meeting:

Don't tell me what the University of Memphis is going to do for my community. The last time you were here doing your research for two years and all we got was a map on the wall.

In an attempt to function as a social asset, in 2008 the CHNM began to engage area residents by hosting community events, such as a locally produced photography exhibit, and by sponsoring film showings such as *Black Indians: An American Story* both at the CHNM and the local community center. The CHNM also hosted and participated in events such as "Toxic Tours" of the neighborhood and environmental justice and community partnership events organized by the Memphis chapter of the Sierra Club.

A turning point in the community engagement occurred in the summer of 2010 when the CHNM partnered with a local nonprofit, the Westwood Indian Hill Neighborhood Development (WIND) to create a permanent exhibit on the African-American Cultural Heritage of Southwest Memphis at the Museum. Over a six-month period, WIND and the CHNM met regularly to develop a process that aligned with the mission of each institution. The exhibit proposal centered on seven cubic

feet of artifacts, field notes, and plan maps from a 1920s-era African-American farmstead, the Big Hackberry site (40SY607), excavated at the Chucalissa site complex. The 2002 excavation of 40SY607 remained unreported at the CHNM because of a past interpretive focus that included only the Native American occupation of the site.

The farmstead exhibit proposal provided a means to further the mission of each organization. For WIND, the exhibit provided an educational opportunity while creating a cultural heritage product in an under-served community. For the CHNM, inclusion of a historic-era exhibit enhanced the holistic interpretation of Chucalissa's built environment. The exhibit would incorporate a voice not heard in any other cultural heritage venue in Memphis, the African-American community of Southwest Memphis.

To provide the local community voice, nine high school students from an application pool of 35 were selected to create the exhibit. The application criteria required that the students live in the zip code surrounding the Chucalissa site, be enrolled in an area high school, and complete an essay on why knowing about the cultural heritage of their community was important.

The high school students created the exhibit (Figure 1) over a five-week period, working 30 hours each week. The students were compensated with a modest stipend. A UM Anthropology Department graduate student coordinated the project for her M.A. practicum. A second graduate student served as a project intern from the UM's Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program. The two graduate students facilitated the work of the high school students on a daily basis. Exhibit creation methods included artifact analysis, structured interviews with community members and historians, literature research, and the physical creation and installation of the exhibit. The students made all of the final decisions on exhibit content.

In the first week of the project, one of the high school students asked what the CHNM intended to do with the artifacts and the exhibit after the students left. The staff member replied that the exhibit would be permanently on display at the CHNM and that if the students' children visited 20 years in the future, the exhibit might be updated, but would still be in place. The response to this question was a turning point for the high school students' engagement in the project. The answer demonstrated that the CHNM was serious about the project and the exhibit creation was the students' opportunity to tell the story of their community.

Initially, WIND and the CHNM planned that the only product would be an exhibit based on the artifacts excavated from the farmstead. However, because the high school students made the final content decisions, they chose to create much more. In addition to the farmstead exhibit, the students also created six 60-x-180-cm banners that traced the history of the African-American community in Southwest Memphis from the early 1800s to the present day. The students also created a series of "Did you know?" wall placards that recounted important historic facts about their neighborhood. The students recorded over 30 hours of oral history interviews that resulted in a 20-minute documentary. Finally, the students began a resource center at the CHNM to curate the research documents they obtained during the five-week project.



**FIGURE 1.** Angel Conway, one of the student co-creators, leading a tour of the African-American Cultural Heritage exhibit.

The only project criterion the CHNM insisted on was that the exhibit must be focused on Southwest Memphis—the basis for the grant that funded the project. For example, at first when discussing the Civil Rights Movement, the student's default was the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in downtown Memphis, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

Similarly, the default for music was to consider the famous Beale Street in downtown Memphis. When refocused to Southwest Memphis, the students interviewed their own pastors and elders who were active in the Civil Rights Movement, participated in bus boycotts, and were imprisoned with Dr. King. When re-focused on musical traditions in their neighborhoods, they discovered that recording artists such as Al Green, Little Howlin' Wolf, and others lived in Southwest Memphis. The soundtrack for the documentary they produced was performed by a neighborhood resident, Mrs. Bobbie Jones, who was the high school music teacher of Stax recording artist Isaac Hayes.

The CHNM staff insured that both the high school and UM graduate students used best practices in the exhibit creation, but the content was decided by the students. The CHNM hosted an exhibit opening on September 11, 2010, that premiered the community voice of Southwest Memphis in the Museum's physical space. As one of the students noted in his comments at the opening, "It was all on us to decide what was going to be in the exhibit." At the opening, the individual who was so critical of the University's community role in 2008, attended and stated "We

need to let more community members know about our exhibit at the Museum."

The 2010 co-creation of the African-American Cultural Heritage in Southwest Memphis exhibit led to several related projects:

- Shortly after the exhibit opening, the CHNM staff met with community residents and the high school students who worked on the exhibit to discuss future projects. The CHNM staff suggested hosting a Black History month event focused on Southwest Memphis. The Black History month event is now completely organized by community residents and is held each year at the CHNM. Additionally, the CHNM now routinely hosts local community events and regional showings such as the American Library Associations' traveling exhibit *The Emancipation Proclamation 1863 to the Civil Rights Movement 1963*.
- Since 2012, the African-American Cultural Heritage exhibit has been updated. High school and college student interns who are residents of Southwest Memphis digitized all text panels and the resource center. The files were placed on the website [Cultural Heritage in Southwest Memphis](#) (2015). In 2014, additional oral histories were uploaded to the website by both area high school students (volunteers) and UM students (independent study course credit).

- The CHNM has become a magnet for community service learning opportunities for area high school and college students. Although initially focused on artifact processing, the CHNM expanded the service learning activities to include tasks related to oral history and other natural and cultural heritage projects.
- While conducting a focus group with community residents for exhibit upgrades at the CHNM, one community member reflected that the display on prehistoric agriculture was of particular interest and reminded him of traditional foods grown in his youth. He lamented the lack of a suitable public space for such a garden today. In response, the CHNM met the community's expressed interest and need by providing protected space on the Museum grounds for an urban garden.
- The CHNM is able to provide technical and logistical support to address other expressed community interests and goals. For example, the CHNM facilitated a UM student's graduate research project to address a concern regarding abandoned cemeteries by using the Cemetery Resource Protection Training (CRPT) Program created by the Florida Public Archaeology Network (Miller 2015).
- In 2012, through a partnership with T.O. Fuller State Park and the Westwood Neighborhood Association located in Southwest Memphis, the CHNM hosted an AmeriCorps NCCC Team. Over an eight-week period, the Team worked with each of the three partnering agencies. Since 2012, the CHNM hosted four eight-week AmeriCorps Teams and in 2013 was presented the Sponsor of the Year Award by the Southern District of AmeriCorps NCCC. At the CHNM, the teams completed renovations to the repository, assisted in shovel-test programs, processed artifacts, built several outdoor activity structures, and performed other infrastructure improvements. The community projects focused on elderly and military veteran homeowners on fixed incomes to correct environmental code violations and perform minor to moderate structural repairs.
- In the summer of 2015, the CHNM served as a resource for five one-week summer camps for high school students at the nearby Freedom Prep Charter School (FPCS). The camp topics were determined as needs by the FBCS faculty and included journalism, engineering, oral history, web design, and archaeology. The CHNM provided resources to meet those needs.

The seeds for the above list of projects were planted in the 2010 discussion between the CHNM and WIND based on three boxes of historic materials from a forgotten excavation of the Big Hackberry site. Beyond considerations of engagement and stakeholder building, a co-creative approach proved necessary to insure that the exhibit was of interest to the community members who visit the CHNM. Because the project was not just about but also by the community, subsequent projects generated increased community support. The content of Black History Month events, the community garden decisions, the type and location of AmeriCorps community projects, selecting the interviewees for oral history projects, and topics for the FPCS summer camps were made by the community members. This is not to suggest that the CHNM staff offered no opinions on process or content. Co-creation does not mean abstention from the process. But the CHNM staff has the latitude to "de-center" not just

the authority of the archaeologists but also the authority of the discipline. In so doing, co-creators build more robust products that meet the needs of all participants. In a five-year summary of the foregoing project, Connolly et al. (2012:241) note that:

if in 2007 we asked the residents of Southwest Memphis what the C.H. Nash Museum meant to them, in all likelihood, their response would focus on how some of "our children visit for school field trips and Chucalissa is where the Indian Mounds are located." If we ask that question today, the response will include "Chucalissa is the place where there is an exhibit on the cultural heritage of our community; where there is a resource center on our community history; the place where we hold our Black History Month celebrations; where our traditional foods garden was planted last year; where the AmeriCorps Teams that work in our community live; and also where the Indian Mounds are located."

## CO-CREATION AND THE FRED JOBE SITE SURFACE COLLECTION<sup>2</sup>

The second co-creative case study presented in this paper began in the spring of 2013 with a collection of surface artifacts curated at the CHNM from the Fred Jobe Site (40LN195 and 40LN196). The co-creators in this project were members of the Memphis Archaeological and Geological Society (MAGS), a student intern, and Graduate Assistants (GA) at the CHNM. All of the co-creators ultimately participated in the project as equal partners addressing their expressed needs that were supported by the regular CHNM staff. In the project, the co-creators were the ultimate decision-makers in content and focus. The CHNM staff trained, consulted, and assisted in the direction of the public participation in the project and held ultimate veto power in any process not in line with best practices for the preservation and presentation of the archaeological collections.

In addition to one student intern who worked with the Fred Jobe collection, the project also involved the four GA students assigned to the CHNM. Each GA works for 20 hours per week during the academic semester. The work consists of visitor services and special projects. Special projects are negotiated with each GA based on their research interests and the needs of the CHNM. GA projects typically include collections work, program development, event planning, and exhibit design.

MAGS was formed in the 1950s as a group of avocational archaeologists who conducted some of the first excavations at the Chucalissa site and published the first report on site research (Beaudoin 1953). Although the MAGS focus evolved more toward geology over the past 50 years, many members maintain an interest in archaeology.

In 2012, MAGS formed an Archaeology Interest Group and scheduled regular education and work meetings to further their participation in activities at Chucalissa. To support the educational component, the CHNM created binders with contextual readings that included articles on the 1950s MAGS excavations at Chucalissa, archaeological methods, projectile point and stone tool analysis, museum exhibit design, and a glossary of archaeological terms.

During one of the volunteer work sessions, MAGS members inventoried artifacts from the Fred Jobe site collection. The CHNM accepted and accessioned the collection in 1982. The 3,000 or so prehistoric artifacts included many whole projectile points, ground stone, and ceramic sherds. The MAGS members were intrigued by the quality and quantity of the whole artifacts, particularly the projectile points in the collection. Upon inventory, the collection seemed ideal for a museum exhibit with a "Big Idea" (Serrell 1996:1–6) or central theme on how information obtained from prehistoric surface collections can be used to answer questions about the prehistory of the area—an important message to communicate in any archaeology or history museum. When contacted, the Lincoln County Museum in Fayetteville Tennessee, about 350 km from the CHNM and located near the Fred Jobe site, expressed an interest in installing an exhibit on site collections.

The MAGS Archaeology Interest Group began to brainstorm what such an exhibit might include. All agreed that the Big Idea—*From the Field to the Museum*—was a good one. However, after performing a preliminary typing and sorting of the artifacts, the MAGS members were not interested in actually creating the exhibit for the Lincoln County Museum. Instead, for their next project, MAGS members chose to use unaccessioned CHNM surface collected materials to create traveling trunk exhibits for display in area schools and at education and mineral shows.

The sequence of events and activities with the MAGS Archaeology Interest Group is typical of the co-creation process. Community partners participate based on their expressed needs and interests. This does not mean that the CHNM must satisfy every request. Rather, as a practical matter, the CHNM and community are in dialogue such that a subset of community interests and needs jibe with the Museum's interests and needs.

When the MAGS members lost interest, the Fred Jobe exhibit Big Idea did not go away. Through UM archaeology and museum studies courses, the CHNM recruits interns each year. The CHNM maintains a list of potential intern projects. Specific topics are typically determined by matching the intern's interest and needs with those of the CHNM. In the fall of 2013, Anthropology undergraduate Nur Abdalla chose to take on the analysis of the Fred Jobe collection for an internship. She chose the specific collection because the materials and their context drew on her combined interest and needs to gain experience in collections analysis and exhibit design. By the end of the 150-hour internship Nur gained experience in ceramic and stone tool analysis, along with the steps to document archaeological sites.

In the spring of 2014, for her class project in the Applied Archaeology and Museums course at UM, Nur proposed to create and install a temporary exhibit on the Fred Jobe collection at the CHNM. Nur finalized the Big Idea for the exhibit as *From the Field to the Museum: What We Can Learn from Artifacts Collected in Plowed Fields*. Over the course of the semester, she explored subtopics, such as the information artifacts can provide on trade and exchange, site function, stone tool use, and the temporal span of the site occupation—all relevant to the Big Idea of the exhibit. In consultation with professionals and a review of best practices, she made all of the final decisions

on the exhibit creation. By the end of the semester, Nur created and installed the temporary exhibit (Figure 2).

In the fall semester of 2014, students in a Museum Practices graduate seminar, one of the two core courses in the UM Museum Studies Graduate Certificate Program, took the next step with the Fred Jobe collection. Nur Abdalla, by then a graduate student in Anthropology, was enrolled in the Museum Practices seminar. The 15 seminar students critiqued the exhibit created by Nur the previous semester. Through a "what works and what does not work" review, the students made recommendations for exhibit revision. A future internship will combine the student recommendations to create the exhibit that will be permanently installed in the Lincoln County Museum in Fayetteville, Tennessee, just down the road from the Fred Jobe farm where the collection originated.

The CHNM has successfully used this multi-stage co-creative process in other exhibits projects. The oversight and mentorship by the CHNM to the community partner and students assures that best practices are observed and incorporated in all products. For example, the exhibit created by Nur Abdalla (Figure 2) conforms to best practices (e.g., Parman and Flowers 2008; Serrell 1996) on font size, text labels, arrangement, and flow. Aesthetically, the exhibit appears stark and flat compared to other exhibits at the CHNM. The exhibit's aesthetics was a primary critique and recommendation by the Museum Practices seminar students.

The CHNM GA students then considered using a portion of the Fred Jobe collection or a similar type of collection for another exhibit upgrade project.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 2008, the CHNM launched a "Hands-on Archaeology Lab" (Figures 3 and 4) using deaccessioned or never accessioned educational collections curated at the CHNM. A goal was to provide visitors with a tactile/sensory experience with archaeological materials that are usually visible only behind glass. Since 2008, minor changes and upgrades to the lab were added through internships and other projects.

With six years of experience and based on visitor evaluations, in 2014 the CHNM decided to upgrade the Hands-on laboratory exhibit (Figure 5). The four GA students assigned to the CHNM are taking the lead in determining the content and form of the upgraded lab, which may also include materials from the Jobe Site collections.

## DISCUSSION

The two studies presented in this paper are typical of co-creation experiences with collections at the CHNM. Projects such as the Big Hackberry site have a clear beginning, middle, and end and ultimately become decentered from both traditional archaeological interests and archaeological authority. Projects such as the Fred Jobe site collection expand into additional directions but remain focused on traditional archaeological interests and interpretation. Key components for co-creative projects at the CHNM are processes and products that result from the expressed needs and interests of the multiple publics that include community and student partners. Had the Southwest Memphis community not expressed a need and interest



FIGURE 2. From the Field to the Museum temporary exhibit created by Nur Abdalla.

in exploring their cultural heritage, the activities and products flowing from the Big Hackberry site artifacts would not have occurred. Had the MAGS Archaeology Interest Group not rejuvenated the organization's focus in archaeology, coupled with the student educational/research interests, the Fred Jobe site collection project likely would not have gone beyond a simple artifact inventory. The driving force behind the two case studies presented in this paper was that they incorporated the expressed interest and need of the CHNM and the community.

Co-creative processes seem ideal for small museums with limited financial resources that need to perform meaningful projects with curated collections. However, the significance is more far-reaching. Connolly and Tate (2011:325–326) argue that, even with unlimited resources, museums must still solicit volunteers. The argument views museums as public institutions in the service of society. Co-created projects are about not just archaeological research that needs to occur for institutional needs, but archaeological research that must occur based on community needs and interests as determined by the community. Or, returning to Chambers (2004:194), co-creation is in part viewed as “the act of engagement with others who are trying to make decisions related to particular heritage resources.”

A limitation of this paper and the co-creation practice to date is the lack of a comprehensive set of data to demonstrate that the process achieves the desired goals. However, for the problems

noted at the outset of this paper—the need to properly curate collections and enhanced community engagement—we can point to several success measures:

- 95 percent of the CHNM collections (over 500,000 artifacts) are now inventoried, processed, and curated by best practices standards.
- The CHNM is an active participant in numerous ongoing community engagement projects and programs.
- The CHNM annual visitation has increased from 8,000 to 12,000 between 2007 and 2012.
- In 2007, the CHNM logged no internship or volunteer hours. Since 2012, the ratio of internship/volunteer hours to paid staff hours is approximately 1:2.

But are these meaningful measures? For example, Worts (2006:41) writes, “Isn’t it odd that museums—one of society’s principal institutions dedicated to culture—do not measure their success or impacts in cultural terms? Attendance, revenue, objects accessioned, exhibits mounted, and publications published are some of the measures that museums use to assess their operations. But, it can be argued, none of these are cultural indicators. They do not reflect on the cultural needs, opportunities, or well-being of the community.” Worts (2006) proposes a Critical Assessment Framework of intangible cultural indicators as an alternative. In applying a modified version to



**FIGURE 3.** Space used for the Hands-on Archaeology lab exhibit in 2007.



**FIGURE 4.** Hands-on Archaeology lab exhibit in 2008.



**FIGURE 5.** In the process of updating the Hands-on Archaeology lab exhibit, December 2014.

evaluate co-creative volunteer projects at the CHNM, Connolly and Tate (2011:338–342) concluded that 85 percent of the 35 Framework's cultural attributes were successfully addressed.

An additional concern expressed in co-creation is the quality or context of the products. At the CHNM, following Herreman (2004:92) we distinguish between permanent and core exhibits. The former is a fixed presentation that is replaced in total but does not evolve through time. Core exhibits allow for change, revision, and upgrades that can evolve gradually as new information or opportunities become available. Co-creation is ideal for core exhibits, as shown in the *From the Field to the Museum* project. Because of the role of museum staff in co-creation processes, content and best practices quality can be achieved.

The Fred Jobe collection project is an example of providing increased public accessibility to curated collections. Not only does the exhibit explore an important Big Idea, but both volunteers and students used the collection to further their own interests and develop their skills in archaeological and museum research. In her summary paper at the conclusion of her internship in 2014, Ms. Abdalla noted that "the whole process was definitely the most educational and influential experience as an undergraduate in helping me to form my career interests."

## CONCLUSION

The co-creation processes discussed in this paper work best from interdisciplinary and collaborative perspectives. The process cannot work when individuals operate only in their silos of self-interest. Based on the CHNM position in the community, and as an administrative unit of the UM, benefiting from the

opportunities and assets that the UM offers, the institution is ideally situated to maximize the co-creative potential of a broad array of stakeholders.

Based on the two examples in this paper, co-creation projects are clearly not linear or unambiguous. The experiences at the CHNM show that, with time, co-creative projects become easier to integrate into the Museum operation because the ambiguity becomes an expected part of the process. More importantly, all participants have the opportunity to go through an experience in which all are empowered to act on their interests and needs and to determine how each entity can be an asset in accomplishing those goals. Co-creation, without question, has allowed the CHNM to more fully live into its mission of providing the public with "exceptional educational, participatory, and research opportunities."

Following Simon (2010:187), the co-creative processes discussed in this paper have "give[n] voice and be—responsive to the needs and interests of local community members; to provide a place for community engagement and dialogue; and to help participants develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals." In so doing, the co-creation process also proved an effective means for addressing the challenges the CHNM faced in collections management and public engagement.

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## Data Availability Statement

No original data were developed or used in this article.

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## NOTES

1. The only collections not transferred were those curated by the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis and collections from ongoing research or loans to individual UM faculty.
2. Posts published on the author's blog Archaeology, Museums and Outreach (Connolly 2015) contain detail that is synthesized in this section.
3. Through the 1990s, the C.H. Nash Museum accepted numerous donations from avocational archaeologists and the general public, principally stone tools and ceramic sherds (not whole ceramic vessels). The collections typically have no provenience information beyond county. Many of the collections were never formally accessioned. Today we use these materials for educational collections.

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