

## **Collections Policy for Skidmore Archaeological Collection**

Skidmore College Department of Anthropology

First prepared by Edward V. Curtin, Archaeological Consultant, in consultation with Susan J. Bender, Associate Professor of Anthropology, 1993-1994

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Old policy: <https://www.skidmore.edu/anthropology/lab/curation.php>

### Introduction

This policy was initially prepared and adopted in 1994 in the form of the scope of collection statement recommended in the National Park Service Museum Handbook, Part 1 (2:1-14). This format recognizes the comprehensive, institutional, fiduciary responsibility attendant to the curation of archaeological collections, while providing a logical structure to consider the issues, procedures, and protocols contained in the policy. The policy was revised in 2021 following the scope of collections management policies recommended in the Museum Registration Methods, 5th edition and American Alliance of Museums with updates to the range of responsibilities and revisions to conform to current ethical, fiduciary, and legal standards.

This policy aligns with the mission of [Skidmore College](#) and the [Anthropology Department](#). The primary focus is on the education of Skidmore College students. Skidmore College seeks to prepare liberally-educated undergraduates in their quests for knowledge and prepare them to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens. This includes hands-on learning and practical training in archaeological fieldwork, laboratory methods, and collections care and curation. Furthermore, this policy recognizes the College's role as an educational and cultural resource for alumni and for nontraditional student populations, and for providing educational leadership in the Capital District and beyond.

The Skidmore Archaeological Collection facility is compliant with the standards set forth in federal regulations [36CRF79](#) Standards and Guidelines for Curation of Federally-owned and Administered Archeological Collections promulgated by the National Park Service.

### Mission Statement

The Skidmore Archaeological Collection (SAC) is comprised of over 5,000 artifacts, ecofacts, and samples and an archive of records from archaeological surveys, excavations, donations, and research. It facilitates and is a product of teaching and research about the human past of the Skidmore College campus, our community of Saratoga Springs, the upper Hudson River Valley and American Northeast more broadly. The SAC's primary purpose is to support student learning, the [Anthropology Department's Student Learning Goals](#), and student and faculty research. Skidmore students have the opportunity to take classes that generate and use collections and work as collections assistants to learn aspects of collections care. Faculty use collections in teaching and research. We also recognize the interests and rights of descendant and local communities with regard to archaeological collections and research. We recognize the responsibility to engage with those stakeholders as part of sound collections management.

We comply with all relevant local, state, and federal laws when conducting archaeological fieldwork and curating collections. We adhere to the [Principles of Archaeological Ethics by the Society for American Archaeology](#) in carrying out curation, stewardship, and educational responsibilities.

In summary, the purpose of the archaeological collection is to support Skidmore College's mission: the education of students, and the research of its faculty and colleagues, by linking theoretical learning with applied learning to produce informed, responsible citizens. These activities operate in conjunction with local, state, and federal law, and in cooperation with members of source communities, especially Native American tribes or organizations, who hold a cultural interest in the collections that may be curated at Skidmore College.

#### Statement of Authority

##### *Role of the SAC Curator and Collections Committee*

The SAC curator shall act in a supervisory role for the acquisition, deaccession, care, and conservation of materials and objects in the collection, and in formulating and carrying out policies relating to collections management. The Collections Committee shall be made up of the Anthropology Department chair (or designee), the SAC curator, and an appointed student representative. The Committee shall meet once annually or additionally on an as-needed basis to discuss collections management issues. The SAC curator shall seek approval of the Collections Committee for accessions of objects with a controversial nature or needing extraordinary care or housing. The Committee will also approve or disapprove all items considered for deaccession.

##### *Role of the Anthropology Department*

The Anthropology Department holds the fiduciary responsibility for the protection of the assets of the collection as stated in this policy. The Department, via the SAC curator, also has a duty to ensure that the collections are carefully preserved and properly and effectively used in alignment with the College's mission.

#### Ethics Statement

We adhere to ethical codes of the [Society for American Archaeology](#), [American Alliance of Museums](#), [American Anthropological Association](#), and [World Archaeological Congress](#) in our stewardship of archaeological collections. We recognize the rights of descendant and source communities, especially Indigenous communities, to cultural objects and human remains and Indigenous methodologies for interpreting, curating, managing, and protecting Indigenous cultural heritage. Furthermore, we recognize that, as a matter of human dignity, human remains must be treated respectfully at all times.

#### Scope of Collection

The materials requiring curation include artifacts, specimens and samples from archaeological contexts; records of archaeological surveys, excavations, donations and related research; replicas of artifacts, early hominid fossils, primates, and human remains; and articulated and disarticulated human remains. The SAC is comprised of artifacts and related documentation

from archaeological sites on the Skidmore College campus, in Saratoga Springs and the upper Hudson River Valley, as well as adjoining regions across the Northeast from 10,000 years ago through the 19th century. The collection includes:

- amateur collections and associated records from the upper Hudson region donated by Louis Follett and William Butz;
- professionally excavated collections from pre-colonial Indigenous sites in the upper Hudson River Valley;
- a professionally excavated collection from the colonial era Sword's House site;
- professionally made survey collections from the Town of Easton (Washington County) and Deowongo Island (Otsego County);
- the records of the upper Hudson survey and planning report; and
- student excavations at Woodlawn Estate Stables on the Skidmore College campus.

These collections derive from sponsored faculty research, archaeological field schools, student-faculty collaborative research, archaeological field methods courses, and independent studies in cultural resource management (contract archaeology) conducted during the 1990s.

#### Collection Acquisition

Collections under consideration for acquisition must meet the temporal, geographic and research design criteria necessary to satisfy research and educational needs within Skidmore's ongoing programs. Criteria include:

- The object is relevant to the collection and the Skidmore College and the Anthropology Department's mission and purpose.
- The object is unique in a collecting area and would thereby enhance the existing collection.
- The object fills a specific need within a collection or opens a new collection area.
- The object's provenance aligns with relevant legal instruments and best practices for acquisition.
- The object does not have any donor-imposed restrictions or any stipulations regarding the method of display, copyright, or any other limitations that would affect the exhibition or loan of the object.
- The gift is an outright and not a fractional gift.
- The object will be treated according to professional museum standards and in good faith.
- The object's condition must not threaten or endanger any other collections, people, or property.

Archaeological collections may be acquired in three ways. The primary means of acquisition is through College-sponsored faculty and student research and field training programs. Other possible means of acquisition include donations from private individuals and collections made by contract archaeologists who require a repository.

Typically, ownership of the collection must be transferred to the College in the form of a Deed of Gift. Landowner at time of collection should be established and the appropriate legal process followed depending on whether landowner is public, tribal, or private. If, after due diligence, the original landowner or heirs of a legacy collection cannot be located to secure their intent for the collection, the SAC curator will contact the appropriate SHPO or repository for assistance in navigating abandoned property laws. Collections accepted for permanent curation become the property of Skidmore College.

No materials or objects shall be knowingly or willfully accepted or acquired which are known to have been illegally imported or illegally collected in a manner contrary to state or federal law, regulation, treaty, or convention. Skidmore College adheres to the provisions of the [1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property](#), the [Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act](#), and the [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#). We shall endeavor to obtain all rights, title and interest for all acquisitions, without restrictions or limiting conditions if possible, or accepting only those restrictions which shall have the potential of being converted to free and clear title under appropriate law. The SAC curator shall maintain permanent acquisition files that contain all legal instruments and conveyances concerning each acquisition and its origin.

#### *Repository Agreements*

Curation costs for the college's research and field training programs are borne by the college, except as they may be supported by sponsored funds. Collections deriving from sponsored research must be supported by those sources. Curation costs should be calculated based on current rates for curation tasks, time to complete tasks, and labor costs. Assessed costs should cover the furniture, materials, handling, inventory, and long-term management of the collection. In extraordinary circumstances, and in consideration of the significance of the collection for faculty and staff research, the rate for curation may be decreased with the assumption that the researcher will account for the difference through other programmatic means, such as coursework, work study, and supplies and materials funds.

#### *Registration and Cataloging*

Objects acquired will be registered and cataloged under the supervision of the SAC curator. Objects will be catalogued following the Archaeology Lab Cataloguing protocols and records will be maintained in the SAC database and archive.

#### Deaccession and Disposal

All deaccessions must comply with ethical standards and pertinent laws and regulations. Removal of accessioned materials from the SAC is decided by the Collections Committee at the recommendation of the SAC curator. The committee will determine which particular material remains are eligible for disposal, acceptable methods for dispossession, and restrictions for the dispossession certain objects and will follow all relevant laws and ethical guidance.

Objects under consideration for deaccession may be of insufficient educational or archaeological interest, meaning incapable of providing scientific or humanistic understandings of past human behavior, cultural adaptation, and related topics. Material that lacks provenience may be of reduced archaeological interest but may still retain educational value and should be evaluated accordingly.

Further, deaccessioning may occur when objects are overly redundant and not useful for research or teaching. A determination that material remains are overly redundant and not useful for research or teaching must be carefully considered. Archeological context, research questions, and research potential may vary based on geography, time and culture period, scientific or cultural significance, prior analysis, and other factors. It is difficult to predict if future analytical methods will yield useful information about the material remains proposed for disposal. As a result, a representative sample of material remains that are determined to be overly redundant and not useful for research must be retained for curation.

Material remains that are of insufficient educational and archaeological interest may be transferred to nearby Federal agency, especially the New York State Museum or transferred within the college for the purpose of education or a suitable institution to be used for public benefit and education including, but not limited to, local historical societies, university or college departments, and public, private, or charter schools for grades 1st-12th.

Deaccessioning may also occur when an object is repatriated to a descendant or source community, as in the case of a NAGPRA repatriation. If the deaccession is part of a NAGPRA or other legal action, the process follows the federal statute and regulations.

### Loans

All loans are temporary physical transfers of specimens or objects for exhibition, research, and/or educational use, for a finite period of time, and without transfer of ownership. Incoming and outgoing loans are undertaken under the terms of contractual agreements and memoranda of understanding that specify loan terms, dates, conditions, and responsibilities.

#### *Incoming loans*

Proposals for incoming loans are considered in terms of alignment with SAC's mission and objectives, alignment with current faculty research and teaching, the overall research goals, security, space and curation needs, and potential detrimental effects upon artifacts or specimens (depending upon the research plan). Loan agreements must state clearly the term of the loan period. All loaned objects must meet SAC's ethical guidelines concerning licit collection, chain of custody, and import and export. Abandoned loans will convert into an unrestricted gift to the College and may be accessioned as such or disposed of by any means.

#### *Outgoing loans*

Proposals for outgoing loans are also considered in terms of alignment with SAC's mission and objectives, alignment with current faculty research and teaching, the overall research goals, security, space and curation needs, and potential detrimental effects upon artifacts or

specimens (depending upon the research plan). Loan agreements must state clearly the term of the loan period and conditions of curation.

### Collection Care & Conservation

The SAC collections and associated records are stored in spaces managed by the Anthropology Department. Collection inventory is ongoing. All visitors to the collection are provided training in proper handling practices. Temperature, humidity, pests, and light levels are monitored regularly. Objects and associated records are housed and stored in conditions appropriate for the long-term preservation of the material. Digital records are hosted on the Skidmore College server to ensure reliable backups.

### Security

Collections are stored in locked spaces where access is limited to the SAC curator, Anthropology Department faculty and staff, and lab assistants. Student access is controlled and supervised by the SAC curator and keycode access is updated annually. SAC database access is password protected and access controlled by the SAC curator. A sprinkler system is installed to protect against fire damage. A catalog system provides an identification and inventory of materials.

### Collections Access

The uses of the collection are for research, teaching, and small, temporary exhibits. The users of the collection include Skidmore College faculty, staff and students (and collaborators); visiting scholars or descendant/source community members who may travel to the curatorial facility to study portions of the collection; and non-Skidmore affiliated individuals who may propose and install temporary exhibits in cooperation with the SAC curator or other Skidmore College faculty. Use of the collection must align with the SAC mission.

Access to the SAC, including all artifacts, specimens, samples, replicas, and written, electronic, or photographic records is decided through the SAC curator on the basis of alignment with the SAC mission. Requests must be made in writing and submitted via email.

Proposals for exhibits are considered in terms of the overall theme of the exhibit, the security of the exhibition place, potential detrimental effects upon artifacts or specimens (depending upon the exhibit plan), the extent the exhibit matches Skidmore's educational mission, and the potential that the exhibit, or some part of it, may be objectionable to others.

Proposals for destructive analysis must include a researcher with access to proper equipment for analysis, a detailed description of the nature and extent of loss, and clear statements relating the research significance and why the selected materials are suitable and necessary for research. Results of destructive analysis must be shared in a timely manner to add to the collection's associated records.

The disclosure of site location information is restricted depending upon the likelihood that its disclosure could result in vandalism or looting. Typically, scholars and students, with the cooperation of faculty advisors, will be allowed access to records disclosing site locations.

Information disclosing site locations will be provided upon request to appropriate agencies, consultants, or individuals in order to reduce the potential of archaeological site destruction as a result of economic development, looting, or other threat.

The use of Skidmore's archaeological collections, records, photographs, archaeological databases, and reports of research (including contract reports) must be acknowledged. Reports and publications must be referenced according to author, title, and date, and for unpublished works, origin at Skidmore College. Further, acknowledgement of Skidmore College as repository is necessary in scholarship (print or digital), or other ways of sharing research with the public. Photos, maps, and journals generated in courses, independent studies, or collaborative research experiences belong to the SAC archive. Print or digital reports, publications or other products created with the SAC must be provided to the SAC curator for inclusion in the SAC archive. Commercial use of the SAC is not permitted.

#### Triennial Review

This plan should be reviewed by the SAC committee every three years and revised as necessary to account for changes which may occur in college programs or the specific conditions of archaeological collections curation.