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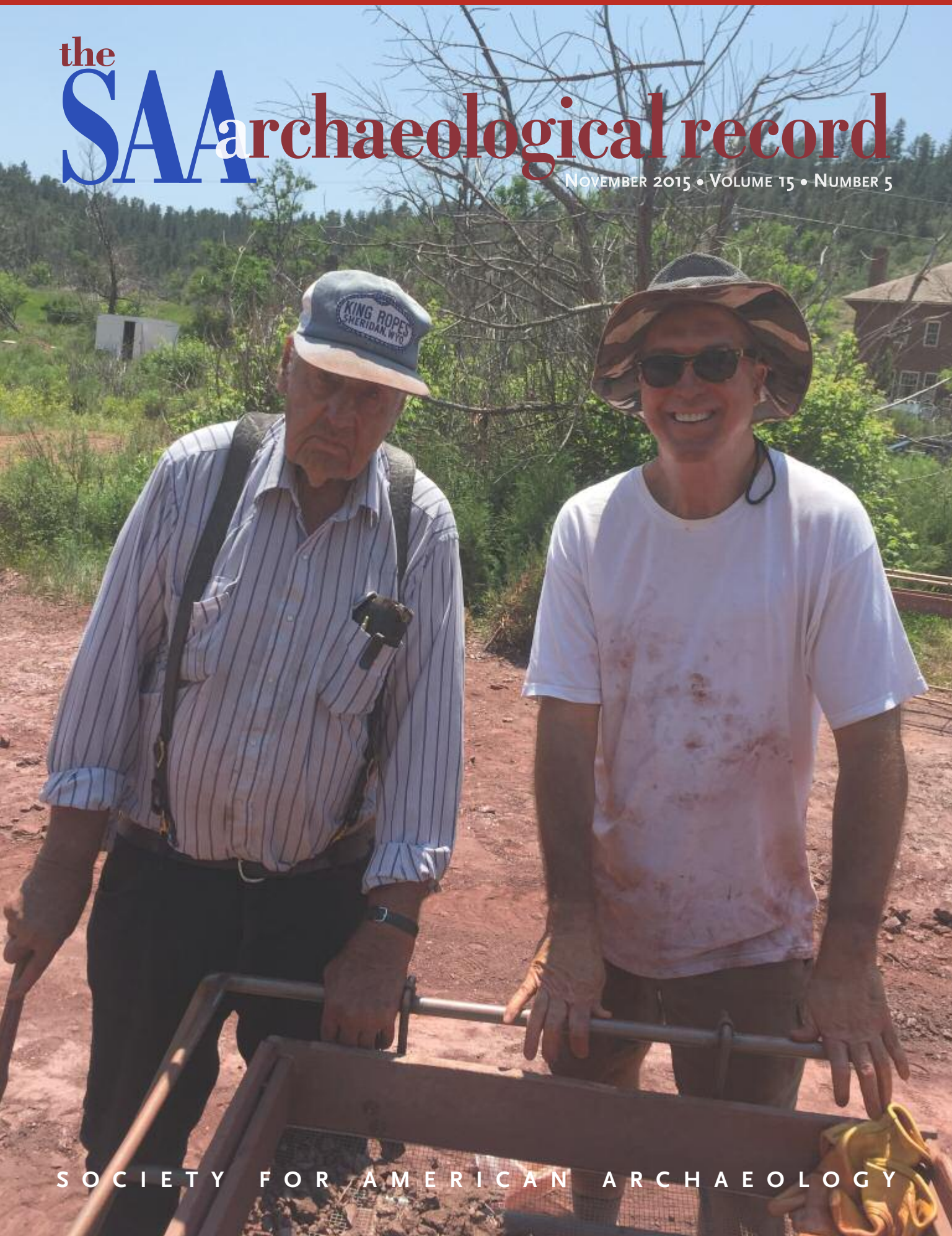

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the SAA archaeological record

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On the cover: Avocationalist Jim Cox, coated in red ochre, screening at the Powars II red ochre mine site in Wyoming in summer 2015.

the SAA Archaeological Record

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Anna Marie Prentiss

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The archaeological record is disappearing at an alarming rate due substantially to the effects of human actions. We are implicated in climate change and its myriad effects that include rising sea levels and loss of coastal archaeological sites. We destroy archaeological sites via earth moving for resource extraction, infrastructure expansion, and community development. We demolish archaeological sites for ideological-political reasons or simply for personal gain. While well intended, even archaeological research, whether via surface collecting or excavation, inevitably also reduces the extent of the record. Artifact collectors play varied roles in this process spanning demolition for personal gain to legitimate research. Because the term "collector" carries such vastly different connotations and because our professional community cares deeply about the record, we struggle with perceptions and treatment of this diverse group of people. Should professionals collaborate with collectors or would time and effort be more effectively spent elsewhere?

In this November 2015 issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record*, guest editors Bonnie Pitblado and Michael Shott open a public discussion of the "Pros and Cons of Consulting Collectors." Contributors offer a diverse array of perspectives. Shott and Pitblado come down strongly on the side of collaboration while recognizing the inherent challenges of such an endeavor. Watkins approaches collecting and consultation with collectors from a Native American standpoint, challenging all of us to consider artifacts not simply as private versus public property as under the law or as sources of scientific data but as objects of cultural heritage with all of its implications. Cox points to the benefits that can come from years of engaged collaboration between professional archaeologists and amateur collectors. Connolly also makes the case for avocational and professional archaeologist partnerships using the history of investigations of the Poverty Point site in Louisiana as a case in point. Fisher et al. discuss the benefits and challenges of working with private artifact collections in southwestern Germany. Goebel graphically portrays the dark side of collecting, contrasting the tragedy of looted rockshelters in the Great Basin with research opportunities provided by the record of interior Alaska. Childs reviews the issues and challenges that come with donating collections to museums. Pitblado and Shott finish with a set of recommendations for moving these discussions forward that includes establishment of an SAA Task Force.

This issue also contains our usual columns with a diversity of news and announcements spanning government issues to our 2016 Annual Meeting. Be sure to catch Sarah Herr's contribution to the Volunteer Profile and Randy Thompson's discussion of his Native American scholarship and its impacts. Finally, on page 4 you will find a special treat ... the news that Gustavo Politis received the prestigious career achievement award in science for 2015 from the Argentinean government!

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF ARCHAEOLOGIST-COLLECTOR COLLABORATION

Bonnie Pitblado and Michael J. Shott

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In this concluding essay, we do two things. First, we explore the diverse contributions to this issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record* to identify points of divergence and common ground. Second, we offer suggestions for translating consensus ideas into proactive steps that individual archaeologists and SAA can take to promote responsible collaboration and improve stewardship of the physical archaeological record, including that portion currently in private hands.

Reconciling the Views of *The SAA Archaeological Record* Contributors

Broadly, contributors to this issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record* (tSAR) appear to operate from one of two very different worldviews. For some (e.g., Cox, Connolly, and Childs), the foundation for evaluating whether and how archaeologists should collaborate with collectors is rooted in what they see as the realities of the U.S. legal system, archaeological ethics, and human behavior. For others (e.g., Goebel and, to a lesser extent, Watkins), a sense of what our nation *should* be (one without an imperialistic past, with stronger heritage laws, where only trained archaeologists indulge the urge to collect, and where collectors are not already having a profound impact on archaeological landscapes) shapes their interactions—or lack thereof—with artifact collectors.

We believe the distinction accounts for why equally accomplished and ethical archaeologists sometimes approach prospective collaboration entirely differently. Accepting our nation, its laws, and its people as they *are*—even when we perceive any or all of those elements as flawed—creates space for collaboration. Operating from a foundation of how the U.S. past and present population *should be* accentuates flaws, often turning them into collaborative deal-breakers. Neither worldview is inherently right or wrong. However, conscious reflection upon one's ethos may help illuminate one's own base comfort level with professional-collector interaction, while demystifying positions colleagues hold on the subject.

We also learned from our contributors just how blurry the lines can be among professional archaeologists, avocational archaeologists, and collectors. In fact, as Cox points out (and exemplifies) in his essay, many people move fluidly among these categories during their lifetime. Spurning all collectors today will likely burn bridges with future colleagues or knowledgeable and dedicated avocationals who stop collecting after learning about satisfying alternatives. Relatedly, definitions of what many tSAR readers likely see as straightforward terms—notably "avocational archaeologist" and "collector"—carry substantively different meanings and connotations when invoked by one archaeologist (or avocational or collector) versus another. Like individual worldview, this likely helps explain why archaeologists struggle to achieve consensus about whether and how to interact with "artifact collectors."

Continuing with the theme of "ambiguity," tSAR contributors, including ourselves, have different takes on how much collecting has gone on over the past hundred years or so; how much of it falls into the category of large-scale looting (e.g., backhoe plundering of mound villages) versus well-documented surface collecting; how collecting varies based on regional norms; the nature of damage various forms of collecting have on the archaeological record; and the extent to which collaboration can mitigate that damage. To our knowledge, no one has studied any of these subjects systematically, which leaves each of us to answer these questions based only on our own experiences. Those experiences vary enormously (witness the essays and contrasting conclusions of Connolly versus Goebel), leading to yet another reason why some of us strongly advocate collaboration while others are more leery of or outright reject the practice.

As much, however, as we perceive and can begin to explain differences among contributors' views of professional-collector collaboration, we also see one crucial point of convergence. When we establish strict parameters for collaboration (e.g., ruling out those who collect for financial profit); agree on the basic characteristics of the prospective collaborators we are talking about (if not on the terms with which we refer to them); and stipulate that collectors sometimes possess important material culture that can advance the discipline—we do approach something close to a consensus view that ethical archaeologists can and should partner with responsible, responsive, ethical collectors (c.f. Goebel, this issue). This suggests that archaeologists who agree that collaboration is worthwhile should approach the issue directly, systematically, and pro-actively.

Where Can (Should) We Go From Here

As discussed in our introductory essay, SAA's mission from the time of its founding has been to welcome responsible collectors into the Society's fold. Moreover, and after some decades of having moved away from that founding principle, SAA has recently re-embraced the goal of working with the metal-detecting community to their benefit and ours (see the March 2015 issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record* for several essays on this subject). For anyone who agrees that the educational approach advocated by SAA's Metal Detecting Task Force (Peebles 2015) is the engagement strategy liable to yield maximum "wins" for maximum stake-holders, it is hard to argue against taking a similarly inclusive approach to those who collect the other material remnants of 11,000+ years of American prehistory. Momentum exists now with SAA archaeologists advising the producers of popular TV shows on metal detecting to mitigate damage to the archaeological record; capitalizing on that momentum seems prudent.

To do this, we advocate formation of an SAA Task Force dedicated to defining appropriate relationships between professional archaeologists and responsible artifact collectors. We envision the principal challenge of the Task Force to be developing guidelines to shape interactions between archaeologists and collectors. This would help ensure that the Society's broader ethical principles are not violated by irresponsible collaboration. It would also alleviate some of the fear of the unknown and the misunderstood (e.g., antiquities laws) that currently underlie the decision of many professionals and collectors to avoid one another entirely.

Once such a Task Force has completed its work, an SAA Interest Group could then be formed to engage in a host of additional actions to further advance ethical relationships between professional archaeologists and collectors. Interest Group efforts—or, for that matter, efforts by individual archaeologists even in the absence of a formal Interest Group—could include the following:

- Working from the newly formalized guidelines, develop a manual to assist those wishing to engage in real-world collaborations. Many successful collaborative models exist already, including Shott's and colleagues' ongoing efforts to document private stone tool collections using 3-D technologies and Pitblado's (2014a) educationally oriented "artifact road-shows." The manual would translate into concrete steps the "do's" and "don'ts" of principled collaboration enumerated in the guidelines.
- Coordinate a series of pilot studies in various regions of the country that adhere to best-practices of collaboration to demonstrate the research strides that can be made when archaeologists and collectors work together. These studies could be compiled into a volume reporting the results to the membership and others with an interest. This could help further break down walls between professional archaeologists and collectors who want their materials to help advance understanding of the past.
- Conduct ethnographic studies of collecting populations to gain a better understanding of their demographics, motivations, extent, and nature of prior interaction with professionals, desire to interact with professionals, the possibility that collaboration can inflate prices of artifacts on the antiquities market and stimulate uncontrolled collecting, and so forth. Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2004) has shown how such studies can fill the gaps in our understanding of individuals who span the collecting spectrum, such that we do not have to rely so heavily on our own personal experiences with a small sample of collectors to inform whether and how we reach out or respond to other prospective private partners.
- Reinvigorate and identify ways to more robustly support SAA's Council of Affiliated Societies (CoAS) (https://ecommerce.saa.org/saa/staticcontent/staticpages/adminDir/affiliates.cfm). The mission of CoAS, which is arguably SAA's most important (if downplayed) nod to the importance of encouraging public participation in the Society, is "to benefit all societies in this field and advance the practice of archaeology." CoAS offers existing infrastructure to reach out to collectors, whether the collectors are themselves members of CoAS societies or are individuals that non-collecting CoAS members are naturally positioned to reach in a mediator-style role.

- Encourage incorporating readings about (e.g., Early 1999; LaBelle 2003; Pitblado 2014b; Shott 2008) and discussion of interacting with private collectors into graduate-student education. We heard comments in our San Francisco forum from current graduate students and professionals who felt their graduate programs had perpetuated an "all collectors are bad" mentality that did not prepare them for the realities of real-world archaeology. Most graduate students are exposed to archaeological ethics in some form. Ensuring that prospective collaboration is part of those discussions would maximize the chances that students' future practice of archaeology and decision making is rooted in a thorough understanding of the issues.
- Embrace mechanisms that introduce collectors and professional archaeologists to one another, so they can learn first-hand what each has to offer. Tracy Brown, a private-sector archaeologist in the southeastern U.S., recently launched a blog called "Can Artifact Collectors and Archaeologists Find a Way to Get Along and Collaborate More?" with the tagline "Exploring the Chances for Mutual Reconciliation, Peace, and Cooperation" (https://archaeologyreconciliation.wordpress.com). Brown's blog features sections devoted to topics such as "Collectors Submit Questions to Archaeologists" and vice-versa, and it offers a productive way for nervous professionals and collectors alike to stick a toe in the water and get to know one another.

Conclusions

We are deeply grateful to all the contributors to this issue of *The SAA Archaeological Record* and to those who participated in our San Francisco SAA forum in spring 2015 for sharing their views on the archaeologist-artifact collector relationship. Like all people, archaeologists bring to their profession unique arrays of experiences, often including interactions with collectors. For many, those experiences have been so universally positive that it is all but inconceivable that others could advocate a blanket rejection of such an exceptionally rich resource. For others, however, negative experiences—particularly with the extreme end of the collector spectrum that most archaeologists, avocationals, and responsible collectors abhor—lead them to see collector-avoidance as the best and safest possible strategy.

We recognize the apparent logic of the view that archaeologists can avoid ethical compromise only by avoiding collectors. Certainly it would seem to follow that if professionals interact only with other professionals, they will never endanger the archaeological record. Unfortunately, however, just as the collector spectrum culminates in the realms of the unethical and blatantly illegal, so too does the professional-archaeologist spectrum—with respect to artifact collection, interpretation of the record, and regrettably, various other arenas. As anthropologists know better than anyone, every group contains bad actors, even when all members have initials after their names.

Unfortunately as well, for professional archaeologists to erect an insurmountable wall between themselves and all collectors, they would be forced to sever all ties with those who identify as avocational archaeologists and with the many state and local societies that represent them. Why? Because in their midst are people who have collected artifacts. Not all avocational archaeologists collect artifacts and not all collectors consider themselves to be avocationals. However, the overlap between the two is sufficiently substantial that to absolutely ensure collector-free interaction, the only solution is to avoid the entire population of avocationals. And that, which strikes us as a would-be travesty and an untenable approach to our discipline, also leaves only fellow professionals as trustworthy partners. Yet we have established that there are bad apples in that bunch, too.

We do not think the world is a perfect place (as we would construct "perfection"). We do think that "eyes-wide-open" is the best way to maximize the chances that any relationship will work to the benefit of those involved, but we also realize that even the most cautious people occasionally get burned when they take a chance on one another. We also believe, however, that rejecting all interaction with any group of people based on an over-generalized view of how its members behave is a recipe for isolation and stagnation. We hope that readers of these essays, whether identifying as a professional archaeologist, an avocational, and(or) a collector, will conclude that actively re-building bridges among us offers our best chance of unraveling and protecting the human story captured in the material culture that resonates so strongly with us all.

To close, we encourage anyone interested in helping with any of the possible proactive steps outlined above, or others that have not occurred to us but that could advance collaboration, to contact us.

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Notes

1. SAA Principle of Archaeological Ethics: http://saa.org/AbouttheSociety/PrinciplesofArchaeologicalEthics/tabid/203/Default.aspx.

2. Letter of February 24, 2012 from SAA President Fred Limp to Kevin Kay, President of Spike TV: http://www.saa.org/Portals/0/SAA/new/American%20Digger%20Letter%20-%20Spike%20TV.pdf.