Department of Transportation — Archaeological Collections Management

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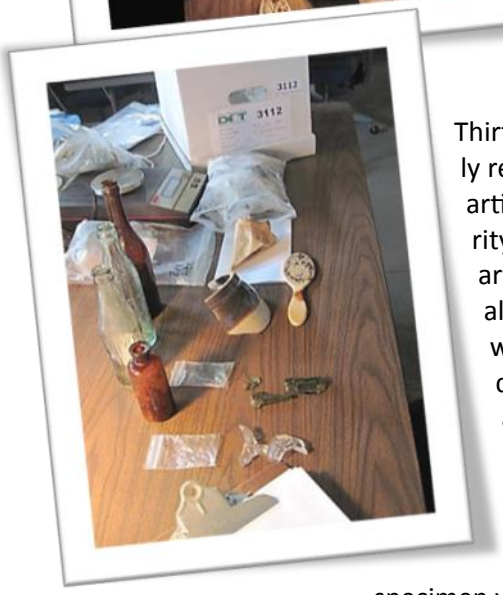
The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) sponsors statewide archaeological research whenever the department initiates a project that may adversely impacting archaeological resources to comply with federal laws. To date, there have been a total of 326 archaeological sites identified in association with NHDOT transportation projects. These sites range in time from the Paleoindian period (10,500 before present) to the Post-Contact Period (post-1400).

NHDOT archaeological collections are stored at the New Hampshire State Archaeological Laboratory, part of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR). Between October 2013 and June 2014, the NHDOT undertook collections management tasks that identified the artifacts derived from NHDOT projects and determined what collection components have research, exhibit, and educational potential.

Following detailed review of the material in each box, more than 259,521 artifacts, derived from 130 archaeological sites, were consolidated as more manageable units into 336 artifact boxes.



Thirty-five boxes and 12,731 specimens were deaccessioned, or permanently removed from the collection using professional guidelines. Deaccessioned artifacts included specimens that had deteriorated resulting in loss of integrity, were hazardous, and/or highly redundant. Most of the deaccessioned artifacts were from the late-20th and early-21st century (e.g., Styrofoam, aluminum foil, aluminum flip-top can lids). In addition, some collections with a plethora of non-diagnostic brick fragments were sampled. Prior to discard, deaccessioned objects were also reviewed for inclusion in an artifact study collection or educational outreach kit. In some collections, hazardous materials such as asbestos were properly discarded. In one case, a clear glass pharmaceutical bottle, manufactured by John Wyeth & Bro., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (c.1860-1899) contained mercury, one of the most toxic and environmentally damaging elements. This specimen was transported to a hazardous waste facility for disposal.

Collections review also identified components that have research value, including clay pipes, quartz lithics, fire cracked rock, and fauna. NHDOT makes items like these available for study by graduate students and researchers.

While the NHDOT assemblage contains some exhibit-worthy specimens, for the most part the collection includes few re-constructible vessel forms. Furthermore, the assemblage of approximately 259,521 artifacts in 336 boxes is relatively small, when compared to the entire holdings of 1,121 boxes at the New Hampshire State Archaeological Laboratory and the more than 800 boxes housing approximately one million artifacts at Strawbery Banke Museum.

In the future, the NHDOT would like to see the collections database on a state network accessible not only to department staff, but also to the NHDHR and other researchers. This network would offer protection in case of computer failure. Ideally, the NHDOT would also like to work closely with the NHDHR and other users to create a state of the art lab facility, with expanded staffing, exhibit space and accessibility for researchers and the general public.