Alaskan Legacy Collections Outside Alaska: Challenges, Opportunities, and Potential

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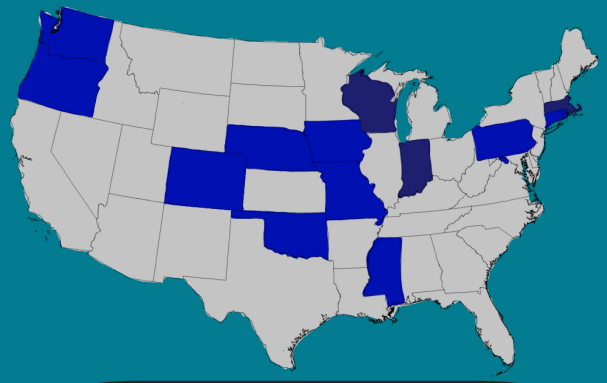
HAFFENREFFER MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

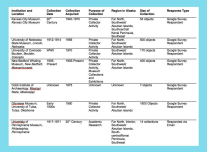
BROWN

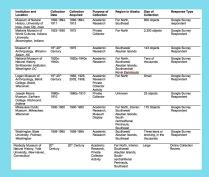


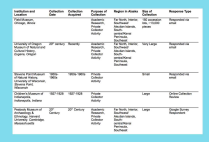
Locations of Lower 48 Collections

One Institution

Two or More Institutions







To compile the institutions seen on the map, I developed a Google form and sent the link to the Association of Academic Museums Group (AAMG) listserv, the Alaska Anthropology listserv, circulated the link via personal social media, and the HMA's social media.

I sent emails to the instiutions on the NAGPRA Culturally Affiliated Native American Inventories Database, and the Culturally Unidentifiable Native American Inventories Database that listed Alaskan material in their holdings. I also used online collections reviews for some museums.

The table includes information on the history of each collection, the size of the collection, and the origins of the collections in Alaska.

The following panels illustrate the work we are doing with our legacy collections from Cape Krusenstern, Onion Portage, and other sites in NW Alaska at the Circumpolar Laboratory in the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology at Brown University.

Challenges

Distance: Object transport and people transport are still hindered by the distance between Rhode Island and Alaska. While objects and people can go by air, transporting material is still expensive and risky for the objects.While people are always welcome to travel to the collection, this can be prohibitively expensive.It can take a full day of travel, or more, to go from Alaska to Rhode Island.

Information Loss: Even the most well-documented legacy collection loses information over the years. Our biggest challenge in the CPL is reconciling the paper card catalog to the artifacts that are present in the collection, and then creating digital records of the "correct" catalog. Every step in the process has the potential for information loss, even though a digital version of the catalog is crucial.

Reliance on Informal Knowledge: In the CPL, the collection has been managed by the original excavators for most of its existence, and was kept separate from the rest of the museum. As a result, records of the collection's use are not formalized or standardized. Retirement and other personal factors impact access to the collection.

Outdated Storage: The CPL collections have been stored in field condition or in boxes and foam that are not archival. There is existing damage to the artifacts because of this. Prioritizing object saftey and good object handling was not a priority for the management of the collection for some time.

Opportunities

Thanks to grant funding from the National Park Service, we are working to create new opportunites for our Alaskan collections by addressing the challenges of managing a legacy collection.

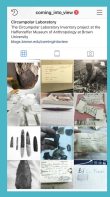
Going Digital: Digitization of the collection's objects and records is the best way to mangage two of our biggest challenges, **Distance** and I**nformation Loss** . Taking care of the basics, like making an Excel catalog, photographing every object, and putting all that information into our collections management software for use online is step one in our project.

Collection History: We recently completed a history of the collection's use at Brown in teaching, research, and exhibition. By formalizing the history we lessen the **Reliance on Informal Knowledge.** It allows us to be more thoughtful about future use of the collection at the university.

Rehousing: Stabilizing the collection through best storage and curatorial practices will make accessing the collection easier for researchers and community members. Our responsibility to provide the best care for archaeological material in perpetuity can only be met by rehousing this collection, and evaluating its needs regularly.

Potential

Opportunities easily become potential once a legacy collection is part of an active management strategy!



Social Media and Outreach: We like to think of social media as part of our plan to reach out to people outside of Brown and academia at large. With our blog and Instagram we can interact with communities outside our own, exposing us to new and fruitful ideas! Follow us on Instagram @coming_into_view

Moving Toward a Decolonized Practice: With good care and understanding of the information and material in the collection we can begin to prioritize and meaningfully incorporate the experiences of descendant communities into our management, education, and exhibition practices.

New Exhibition Focus: After identifying themes in our collection history we can shift our exhibtion focus toward more creative interpretations of the site, or explore peple who are not often the focus of archaeological exhibitions.

New Technology for New Insights: With an organized collection, we can reach out to experts in other fields to collaborate on new projects. We're just beginning a new project using RTI to explore the Ipiutak incised pebbles from Cape Krusenstern.