

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES
STATE COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS



Virginia Department of Historic Resources
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23221

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INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) maintains the State Collections Management Facility for archaeological collections at 2801 Kensington Avenue, Richmond, Virginia. Archaeological collections are unique in that once a site has been excavated, it has been destroyed and the collections remain the only tangible resource left for examination. The agency's mission is to make the irreplaceable archaeological collections available for research and study, exhibit them for the education of the public, and house all collections in archival materials within a safe environment. Also managed by VDHR are the documentary materials (field notes, photographs, maps) associated with archaeological sites. In order to provide strong research, education, and exhibit outreach to the public, archaeological collections representative of all geographical areas and occupation periods in the state are accepted from archaeologists and private collectors. Collections should not be subdivided and stored in multiple locations, and associated documentation should be stored in the same repository as the artifacts.

TRANSFERRING COLLECTIONS

All professional archaeologists working on projects in Virginia may submit their collections to VDHR for curation. Collections shall be accepted through either donations (see Appendix A) or long-term curation agreements. In order for a collection to be accepted, it must have been collected, excavated, or acquired in a professional and ethical manner. Collections will not be accepted if the objects were taken in violation of local, state, or federal laws. All collections that are accepted must be from Virginia or relate directly to the history or cultures of Virginia. Although priority is given to scientifically recovered collections of good provenience, material of unusual quality lacking contextual information may be accepted in accordance with VDHR's Collections Management Policy.

Normally, collections will not be accepted if the owner has placed burdensome restrictions that would prevent, restrict, or guide the research, exhibit, or management of the collection.

Transportation of the collection to VDHR is the responsibility of the donor. To avoid loss or damage, hand delivery of collections is preferred. Delivery by mail or courier must be confirmed with VDHR staff and tracking information provided.

Delivery of collections must be made in arrangement with VDHR's Collections Manager or Senior Curator. VDHR should be notified at least 3 business days prior to delivery. The donor is not released from responsibility of the collection until all paperwork is completed, an inspection of the collection has been performed, and the curation box fee is paid in full.

Collections Curation Box Fee

The curation box fee is \$500 per box (as Hollinger's Standard Record Storage Box of acid free corrugated cardboard 15" x 12.5" x 10") or \$300 per half-sized box (15" x 6" x 10") for artifacts and documentation. This one-time charge is due once the collection is accepted at VDHR. An invoice will be generated and sent to the donor, which can be paid online or over the phone. Fee exemptions will only be made at the discretion of VDHR's Senior Curator and may include (1) collections donated by avocationalists, (2) collections generated as a result of emergency investigations, (3) research projects not related to mandated compliance projects, or (4) VDHR-

sponsored projects. Box fees are evaluated annually and may be changed to match costs associated with perpetual curation.

COLLECTION PROCESSING

The following procedures for processing collections for long-term curation should be followed in preparing artifact collections and documentation for submission to VDHR. These standards are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Curation, 36 CFR 79. These standards should be used to guide the preparation of Virginia collections that are stored elsewhere. Associated documentation (see page 7) should accompany the collections. The disposition of a project's artifacts and records should be decided in consultation with the Senior Curator.

Cleaning

All artifacts should be cleaned. The only exceptions would be those which might provide more information through specialized analysis in their unwashed state, e.g., blood residue analysis. Containers with either special artifacts or artifacts that require special care must be clearly marked, and any specific instructions must accompany the artifacts.

Conservation

Artifacts should be preserved and stable. Depending upon the context, degree and type of deterioration, research and exhibit value of the artifact, selected artifacts may need special conservation treatment. A professional conservator should perform artifact condition evaluations and, when appropriate, conduct the recommended conservation treatment. Archaeological artifacts that require consultation with a conservator include: wet material recovered from submerged or waterlogged sites, dry organics recovered from rockshelters, metals, extraordinarily fragile objects, and those composed of two or more materials. VDHR's State Archaeological Conservator can provide technical assistance.

Cataloging

VDHR does not assign excavation unit numbers, lot numbers, or accession numbers to incoming collections. Artifacts should be sorted by provenience, material, and analytic category. Artifacts or batches of similar artifacts should be labeled with individual artifact numbers within their provenience. This number should be included in the artifact description for the catalogue submitted with the collection. The use of individual artifact numbers facilitates retaining sorts and locating specific objects for study or exhibit. Any artifact's occurrence that does not qualify for a site designation should be termed a 'location' (see Guidelines for Archaeological Investigations in Virginia) and the artifact(s) may be given a 'location' number within that specific project. VDHR does not assign location numbers.

Labeling

Label artifacts with archival acid-free paper (photocopy paper is acceptable) and a barrier coating of adhesive. The adhesive layers should be Acryloid B-72 20% in acetone, but some ethanol can be added to reduce bubbles. For instructions on making B-72, reference [this article](#). Paper labels should be printed in an easily read font, such as Consolas or Times New Roman.

The font size will depend on the object size and location of label but should be generally between 5-9 point font. Apply adhesive to the back of the paper label, place the label on the object, and cover the label with a protective coat with the adhesive.

Label artifacts with the state site number, a number representing provenience, and an artifact number in a standard, inconspicuous location for each object type. This greatly reduces object handling. Should the standard location be unsuitable for an individual object due to unstable or fragile condition, select another logical location. Do not label artifacts along broken edges or covering decorative elements. Label all piece-plotted objects individually. For small collections (fewer than 200 objects) label selected artifacts. Polymers such as Bakelite, rubber, and plastics should not be labeled; secure them in labeled containers that also contain a label on archival material.

For larger collections, label all diagnostics. The following artifact types are examples of those that do not need to be individually labeled: artifacts too small to be labeled (<15mm), slag, cinders, shellfish, non-human bone, fire cracked rock, flakes, window glass, nails, brick, mortar, and coal. These items can be grouped by material type within a provenience. These grouped or batched artifacts receive one artifact number. With other batched artifacts, label one artifact from the group with the site number, provenience and artifact number and place it in a plastic bag with the rest. The bag should be labeled on the exterior and also contain a Mylar, Tyvek, or acid free paper or card stock label with the same information.

Samples

Large quantities of non-diagnostic brick rubble, mortar, window glass, shell, etc. will not be accepted for curation. In general terms, a statistically valid sample (ca. 100) of any particular shell species is needed from each component of a site. Selective sampling of other materials is recommended.

It is preferred that soil samples be processed before being submitted. Unprocessed (raw) soil samples may be submitted for curation only in consultation with VDHR Collections staff. Unprocessed samples, retained for back-up analyses, may require fumigation or freeze-drying at the expense of the depositor.

All large and medium fractions of water-screened material should be sorted prior to submission. If the large quantity of fine fraction material makes complete sorting difficult/impractical/impossible, a statistical sample from various units of excavation should be sorted. Flotation samples should be placed in appropriate sealed containers according to fraction size and accurately labeled, e.g. 'flotation sample, light fraction, context details' or 'water screened sample, heavy fraction, context details'.

Radiocarbon samples and soil samples for chemical, phytolith and pollen analysis should be processed whenever possible before submitting collection for curation. Small special samples of charred material and soil that are submitted for long-term management and possible future analysis or testing should be clearly marked and packaged in appropriate sealed containers.

Selective Discard

Certain types of bulk artifacts and artifacts with limited context or no context have questionable long-term research and exhibit value and thus may not warrant permanent curation with the

collection. These materials may include: fire-cracked rock, flakes, brick fragments, mortar, slag, coal, shell, artifacts designated as 'locations,' and 20th/21st century debris, especially artifacts less than 50 years old. In certain types of field recovery approaches, like controlled surface collecting, many of these items may be noted, counted, weighed, and left in the field. Recovered items that are slated for selective discard must be cataloged and analyzed. The collection's catalog must clearly identify and quantify the discarded materials. A project's principal investigator, in consultation with the Senior Curator, should employ the best professional judgment to decide what to discard. Factors to consider in reaching the decision to selectively discard materials include: archaeological context, the redundancy of the materials, and the item's research, education, or exhibit potential.

Packaging

Place all artifacts in polyethylene, zip-lock plastic bags at least 2 ml thick. Bags 10" x 10" or larger must be at least 4 ml thick. Artifacts must be grouped and bagged by provenience and separated by material type within the provenience. Black Sharpie pens should be used to label plastic bags. Oversized artifacts must be securely tagged with appropriate information.

Use archivally stable and acid-free materials for those items requiring special packaging. If there are questions, please consult the Senior Curator or the State Archaeological Conservator.

If the artifact collection is large, key artifact classes (example: projectile points, personal items, glassware, minimum vessels counts), including illustrated artifacts, may be pulled from the provenience material and bagged/boxed separately. If small collections of artifacts from different sites/projects are packed together in a box, these should be grouped by county; if they are from multiple counties, arrange them alphabetically by county.

Boxes

Place all artifact bags in acid free boxes (either standard 15" x 12.5" x 10" or half-sized 15" x 12.5" x 5" Hollinger corrugated cardboard) organized by catalog number for submission to VDHR. Interior acid-free cardboard boxes may be used as containers and dividers for separate site collections or provenience. Material must be organized by provenience and/or appropriately grouped by material and packed with respect to weight and fragility. No box should weigh more than forty (40) pounds. Label all artifact boxes with site number, provenience, project name, project start date, and research institution, contractor, or individual.

DOCUMENTATION

Ownership

Ownership of the collection to be deposited with VDHR must be clear and documented. Artifacts that are removed from private lands in connection with a federal or non-federal action are generally the property of the landowner. Field records and photographs generated as a result of a federal action are the property of the federal government, regardless of the location of the archeological site. For both donations and long-term curation at VDHR, a copy of a donation agreement signed by the owner, transfer letter, or curation agreement must accompany the collection.

Field Records

Prepare one stable copy of all original field archaeology documentation on acid free paper. Originals on acid free paper are acceptable. These should be organized and clearly labeled and submitted with the collection for management. For long-term storage large-sized maps, drawings, and charts will be placed in flat acid-free files. Do not include material that is not directly pertinent to the field project, such as personnel and budget records, general research and report preparation notes and xeroxes, and rough drafts. Submit one physical copy of the final report for curation in VDHR's Archives.

Artifact Catalog

Submit a hard copy catalogue of all artifacts that includes the name of the organization, project name, start date, site number, provenience, and artifact number.

Treatment Statements

A statement indicating which objects received conservation treatment and a copy of the treatment record must accompany the collection. If conservation has not been completed, provide a list of those objects needing treatment. In order to maintain a stable, long-term storage repository, unstable materials that have not been conserved may be refused.

Photographs

Digital images are required in the form of uncompressed .TIF files. Printed photographs are not required but may be submitted in 5" x 7" format and 300 dpi or higher resolution on archival paper. If submitting slides (Kodachrome is preferred), black and white negatives, or contact sheets, they must be stored in archival material. Label any archival sets of slides and prints with at least the state site number and provenience or subject. Prepare a catalogue of all photographic documentation with an explanation of the labeling information.

Digital Records

Submission of the artifact catalog, final report and scanned field records in digital format are required in addition to hard copy of acid free paper. Digital images are required in the form of uncompressed .TIF files. All digital records can be submitted on computer disks, CDs, USBs, or external hard drives.

Labeling

As indicated throughout this document, accurate, informative labels are required for individual specimens, containers, inventory forms, photographs, etc. The labels should include, where appropriate: site number, provenience, project name, project start date, and research organization, contractor, or individual.

HUMAN REMAINS

In general, the VDHR does not encourage the excavation of human remains, unless natural or human forces imminently threaten those remains.

Procedures for the respectful treatment of human remains and associated funerary objects may vary depending on their state of preservation and the anticipated final disposition of the remains and the wishes of descendants or culturally affiliated groups. Treatment procedures, management or reburial must be established prior to initiating any excavation of human remains (see Permits Governing the Archaeological Removal of Human Remains). All burials deserve respectful treatment transcending even the care afforded to any other class of archaeological materials. Due to the deep cultural and emotional significance of human remains, VDHR does not encourage the long-term management of human remains. Should temporary care be necessary prior to repatriation or reburial, VDHR will provide protective storage. VDHR may accept human skeletal remains, or samples thereof, for secure and long-term management only after consultation with lineal descendants or culturally affiliated groups. Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.

USE OF COLLECTIONS

VDHR encourages the use of its collections for both research and interpretation by museums, universities, and other qualified individuals and institutions. Collections may be used either at VDHR or through a loan agreement depending on the needs of the individual or institution, and the condition of the collection.

The Senior Curator must be contacted to make an appointment to view materials from any collection. For the study of larger collections, arrangements can be made for limited use of departmental lab space. The integrity of the data represented by these collections must be respected. No alteration of labeling information on or with the artifacts will be permitted. No resorting or redistribution of artifacts, or the physical alteration of the artifacts within these collections will be allowed, unless authorized by the Senior Curator.

The researcher must secure permission from VDHR to photograph the artifacts for any educational, publicity purposes, or for reproduction in any exhibit catalog or professional report. Special permission must be granted for reproduction of such artifacts in any media for purposes of sale. All displayed or reproduced artifacts must be credited to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. A copy of any publications resulting from use of the collections should be deposited with VDHR's Archives.

VDHR reserves the right to deny requests for use based on bona fide reasons deemed to be in the best interest of the collections and/or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

LOANS

VDHR shall accept and examine all requests for loan of the collection(s). Qualified institutions and individuals shall submit their requests to the Senior Curator. The request shall specify the purpose, duration, location, and security precautions available for the loan. The Senior Curator may visit the site and review the security elements (see Appendix B).

VDHR reserves the right to review any plans for exhibition and interpretation of loaned artifacts and to refuse approval of those plans which in the estimation of VDHR would result in unsafe, improper, or inaccurate exhibition or interpretation of these artifacts.

DEACCESSION

Selective removal of material from the state's archaeological collection may be appropriate. As stated earlier, certain types of redundant material with limited context have questionable long-term research and exhibit value and may be removed from the permanent collection upon review. These materials may be removed from the state's archaeological collection under the supervision of the Senior Curator in consultation with the VDHR Collections Committee and, whenever possible, with the principal investigator. Careful documentation of all deaccessioning will be maintained along with the original records pertaining to the objects being removed from the collection.

The options for deaccession of archaeological objects* include, in order of preference:

- transfer through donation or exchange to another repository for research or educational use
- repatriation. physical destruction.
- return to rightful owner, e.g. in cases where donor was not the legal owner.
- public auction (seldom appropriate for archaeological objects recovered in CRM or research context).

**adapted from Sullivan and Childs 2003. Curating Archaeological Collections. AltaMira Press.*

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the VDHR Collections staff.

Allison Mueller, Senior Curator (804) 482-6441

Katherine Ridgway, State Archaeological Conservator (804) 482-6442

Serena Soterakopoulos, Collections Manager (804) 482-6100

Appendix A

Collections Donation Agreement

Name of Donor: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ **Email:** _____

Name of Collection: _____

Site Number(s): _____

DHR Transaction Number: _____

Description of Collection: _____

I hereby donate the collection named above to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to become its permanent property. The collection will be administered in accordance with the VDHR's established policies. The VDHR has free and clear title to the above-referenced collection, and may process and preserve the collection and use it for research and education on an unrestricted basis. The VDHR reserves the right to deaccession and dispose of or transfer the collection in an appropriate manner at its sole discretion and as set forth in the agency's Collections Management Policy (April 16, 2008 and as amended or revised).

I certify that this collection was ethically or legally obtained, and I hereby indemnify and hold the VDHR harmless from any liability concerning the procurement of this collection from its original location.

Donated by:

[Donor Name] Date

Received by:

[DHR Representative] Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Appendix B

Outgoing Loan Agreement

DHR Transaction Number: _____

Institution: _____

Address: _____

Contact: _____

Phone Number: _____ **Email:** _____

Insurance Documentation Provided

Purpose: _____

Date Loaned: _____ **Date Due:** _____

Site Name and Number(s): _____

Number of Objects: _____

Artifact List Attached

Conditions Governing Loan

1. Materials in the Department of Historic Resources (DHR) collections belong to the Commonwealth of Virginia or are maintained by the DHR through loan agreements with the owner and are available to qualified institutions for the purpose of exhibit or study. It is understood that these materials will be used in the best interest of the Commonwealth; therefore, the DHR reserves the right to determine when a loan of artifacts is warranted. Arrangements can also be made to study the collections at the DHR office in Richmond, Virginia.

I hereby acknowledge Section 1 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

2. The DHR reserves the right to review any plans for exhibition and interpretation of loaned artifacts and to refuse approval of those plans which in the estimation of the DHR would result in improper or inaccurate use, exhibition, interpretation of these artifacts.

I hereby acknowledge Section 2 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

3. The length of the loan period will be determined by the Senior Curator after consideration of the borrower's interest and purpose. Loans made by the DHR are subject to recall by the DHR at its discretion with thirty (30) days' notice to the borrower.

I hereby acknowledge Section 3 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

4. The DHR will bill the borrower for all charges in connection with shipping or special packing incurred as a result of making this loan. The loaned material shall be insured by the borrower at the value given against all risks for the full period of the loan, including time in transit. The borrower must possess an indemnity agreement or insurance for insurable materials prior to the loan. Damages, whether in transit or on the borrower's premises, shall be reported to the DHR immediately, regardless of who may be responsible. Should damage occur during transit, notify the carrier and the DHR immediately. Save all packing materials until the carrier or their agent has had the opportunity to inspect them. No action is to be undertaken to correct damages incurred in transit or in the borrower's care without the DHR being notified and approving such actions.

I hereby acknowledge Section 4 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

5. It is understood that artifacts covered by this agreement shall remain in the condition in which they are received. They shall not be conserved, cleaned, repaired, retouched, or altered in any way whatsoever except with prior written permission by the DHR. Any examination which alters or destroys the artifact must be approved by the DHR via a destructive analysis proposal submitted to the DHR Collections Committee.

I hereby acknowledge Section 5 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

6. The borrower must secure additional permission from the DHR to photograph the artifacts covered by this loan agreement for record, educational, and publicity purposes, or for reproduction in an exhibit catalog or professional report. Special permission must be granted for reproduction of such artifacts in any media for purposes of sale. All displayed or reproduced artifacts must be credited to the DHR as "Courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources", or any special wording as directed.

I hereby acknowledge Section 6 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)

7. The DHR requires that certain conditions be met when collections are loaned for study and analysis:
 - a. If artifacts must be altered in any way (i.e., mended or labeled) for analysis of the material to proceed, the borrower must use methods approved by the DHR. It is required that such alterations be reversible. The DHR must approve any alterations and the use of any catalog system applied to the collections.
 - b. When analysis of the loaned material is complete, the DHR must receive a copy of the research results for its records (including a description of methodology

employed, data produced, and interpretations). If approved illustrations (i.e., photographs or drawings) of loaned artifacts are made to accompany a report, the DHR requires that the illustrated artifacts be indicated as such.

*I hereby acknowledge Section 7 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)*

8. Upon completion of the loan period, the borrower shall return the materials packed in the same manner as received (i.e. with the same cases, packages, pads, wrappings, and other furnishings which ensure the organization and protection of the materials). Any changes must be specifically authorized in advance. The material shall be returned via DHR-approved transportation. All costs for transportation connected with the loan will be paid by the borrower unless other arrangements are made.

*I hereby acknowledge Section 8 of this loan agreement _____
(initial)*

Receipt of the materials summarized above and described in the attached listing, all in good condition, is hereby acknowledged, and the conditions governing the loan are hereby accepted.

Borrower:

[Name, Title, Organization]

Date

DHR Representative:

[DHR Representative]

Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources