

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY CURATION FACILITY

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ABSTRACT

Early last year, the San Diego County Archaeological Society organized a Repository Planning Committee to guide the development of a curation facility for archaeological collections from sites in the County. As a follow-up to the presentation given at the 1991 SCA Annual Meeting (Royle 1992), this paper will report on the progress made to date and the current status of this important project.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Spurred into action by the receipt, in 1990, of \$168,000, the San Diego County Archaeological Society (SDCAS) has undertaken a series of actions in the past year toward the creation of an archaeological curation facility to serve the County. The organizational approach to the task has been through the Repository Planning Committee (RPC), created by the SDCAS Board of Directors. The RPC originally consisted of 9 members, selected to bring distinct perspectives to the process. While not formally representing their agency or institution, RPC members came from the U.S. Forest Service, Caltrans, San Diego County, the San Diego Museum of Man, San Diego State University, and a commercial CRM firm, plus three SDCAS Board members.

Since the spring of 1991, the membership of the Committee has been expanded to include members from the City of San Diego and the U.S. Navy. Part of the reason for adding these persons was their interest in participating in the creation of a curation facility. In addition, the City is undertaking its Clean Water Program, which will generate collections requiring curation in a 36CFR79 facility. Also, the Navy is both a generator of collections and the most likely source of an existing structure for conversion into a repository. In the meantime, the

original \$168,000 has been gradually shifted from certificates of deposit into conservative mutual funds, and the amount now totals about \$190,000.

By the spring of '91, the Committee had created a PERT schedule chart to serve as a guide for its work, and generated a survey form and a list of persons and organizations to which to send it. Since then, 2 subcommittees, Collections and Existing Facilities, have been organized.

COLLECTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

The Collections Subcommittee was created to deal with the demand side of the repository task, starting with the results of the survey.

Although it required a follow-up letter in some cases, a total of 23 survey responses were received, a fairly good return of the 41 surveys sent out. Of these 23 respondents, 18 indicated that they had collections from San Diego County, with volumes ranging from 1 to 4000 ft³. The total of the volumes of these 18 collections was 13,762 ft³. These were in addition to the collections at San Diego State University. Realizing that some allowance needed to be made for the SDSU collections and for others not specifically covered by the responses, the assumption

was made that the survey had identified 60% of the collection volume. This led to an estimated volume of collections from San Diego County of approximately 23,000 ft³ as of mid-1991.

The next question was, at what rate is the collection volume increasing? The responses to this question in the survey added up to about 6% per year, plus a number of responses indicating uncertainty. While a number in the 10-15% range would seem reasonable, it is necessary to realize that the other 40% of the existing collections, such as the ones at SDSU, are probably growing at a much lower rate than this. Furthermore, in reviewing the volumes reported by the various companies, individuals, and institutions, it seems obvious that varying degrees of culling of collections have taken place. Depending on the initial fee structure, additional culling of existing collections is probably likely, and the volume of future collections submitted may be similarly affected by culling. My own feeling is that using a 10% growth rate, applied to the 23,000 ft³, is probably on the high side, and that the actual rate will be less than this.

The next question to be answered is how this rate is to be applied. If each year sees an increase of even 10% of the volume curated at the beginning of the year, after 25 years there would be nearly 250,000 ft³, and the annual additions would equal the present total. At 15%, the volume would be 750,000 ft³ and the annual additions would be 3 times the current total volume. Simply projecting growth at a continuing annual rate of 10% or 15% of today's volume would give about 80,000 ft³ and 109,000 ft³, respectively. Given the finite limits of both the cultural resources being excavated and the financial resources paying for the excavations, exponential growth rates over that length of time have to be questioned. Reality is probably somewhere in between the arithmetically and geometrically projected volumes.

EXISTING FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

To some extent, the required volume

calculation becomes a moot point in the cold light of financial reality. While not entirely giving up on the idea of building a new structure specifically to serve as a curation facility, simply housing collections out there today would probably require a building of about 15,000 ft². Obviously, locating and obtaining long-term use of a suitable existing structure would free up the Society's funds for outfitting the facility. On the other hand, an existing structure could also present problems that more than consumed the savings, or which provided inadequate space for growth. Partly to investigate this, the supply side of the problem, the RPC created the Existing Facilities Subcommittee.

Several members of the RPC, but particularly Ron May and Andy Yatsko, have had discussions with the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) in San Diego regarding building availability. Ron's contacts were both to explore locations to curate the collections from the Fort Guijarros Museum Foundation's excavations on the U.S. Navy Submarine Base at Ballast Point, and the broader question of a facility for collections from other Navy projects in the area and non-Navy collections from San Diego County at large. Andy is a U.S. Navy archaeologist operating from North Island Naval Air Station, with responsibility over such areas as San Clemente Island.

NAVFAC has expressed a willingness to help identify a suitable structure for the facility. At first, a concrete structure at La Posta, in eastern San Diego County, was offered. At about 60 miles away from San Diego, this was declined as being too far away to be convenient to users, as well as having longer-than-desired response times to emergency calls. The next proposal by the Navy was a structure on Camp Elliott, adjacent to Interstate 15 in San Diego. Unfortunately, these are old, wooden buildings, and unsuitable from the point of view of fire risk. The possibility of occupying a structure at Miramar Naval Air Station was investigated next. This failed due to a reluctance on the part of the base to having civilian access to the base.

Attention has now focused on a structure on Pacific Highway, just north of Taylor

Street, in the Old Town area of San Diego. The structure is presently occupied by the Naval Electronics Systems Engineering Center (NAVELEX), which is planning a move to another location in San Diego. The timetable for this relocation is uncertain at this time, but NAVELEX needs to move in the near future in order to have adequate space to accomplish its mission. Their present building is actually 4 World War II "semi-permanent" structures which have been joined together, encompassing 61,000 ft². The Committee has not yet had an opportunity to inspect them, but expects to do so next month.

A number of the RPC members had not previously visited archaeological curation facilities with an eye to the physical requirements, much less the financial and operational aspects, inherent in one. Another function of the Existing Facilities Subcommittee has been to identify such facilities in southern California and the Southwest, especially those that meet 36CFR79, and arrange for visits. Thus far, Committee members have toured the archaeological curation areas of the San Diego Museum of Man and the San Bernardino County Museum. These visits have already answered a number of questions, identified others, and will make it easier to envision the design or conversion of a structure for a repository. We hope to visit the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History later this year, and possibly the National Park Service facility in Tucson.

The RPC had requested, and the SDCAS Board or Directors had authorized, that 1 or 2 members of the Committee attend a National Park Service/George Washington University course, "Archaeological Curation and Collections Management", last December. Unfortunately, when we tried to register, we found the course to be oversubscribed. Taking a different tack, we arranged for one of the course instructors, Pam Cressey, Director of Alexandria Archaeology in Alexandria, Virginia, to visit San Diego. Cressey will be in San Diego next week to conduct a 1-day workshop on certain issues of importance to the committee. This workshop will be jointly sponsored by SDCAS and the City of San Diego, and

will focus on aspects of the course especially pertinent to establishing a curation facility.

OTHER ISSUES

Two events have occurred in San Diego in the past year that have highlighted the need for action on the curation issue. First, an estimated 1800 ft³ of archaeological collections, including some orphaned ones, had been residing in a State Parks storage building in Old Town since 1982. State Parks requested that these collections be moved, to make room for some of their own. The bulk of the collections belonged to a few archaeological consultants, and these were moved out, but the remaining ones, the orphans, were left. Fortunately, State Parks agreed to allow them to remain there until such time as another place, hopefully a regional repository, can be found for them.

The second event was also a good news/bad news story. In February of this year, Michael Trimble of the St. Louis District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers visited southern California to spot-check the condition of Department of Defense archaeological collections. One of them, from Camp Pendleton, is located at SDSU, under a contract between the University and the federal government. This collection was being kept in 1 of 4 sea containers at SDSU. When Dan Whitney, head of the University's Anthropology Department, and Trimble opened the container, they found that it had leaked. There was condensation on the inside of the container, and the moisture had damaged boxes and bags. Afterward, Whitney met with senior administrators at SDSU and impressed upon them the commitment the University made when it accepted this and other collections. As a consequence, the University has funded \$62,000 for the rehabilitation of the collections, where possible. After they are rehabilitated and properly cataloged, the collections will be stored in the basement of the SDSU library. And, as a further benefit of the process, some students will be given an earning/learning opportunity.

It would be fair to state that there is a feeling on the part of the Committee that

we are beginning to make some significant progress toward a repository for archaeological collections from San Diego County. The good working relationship with NAVFAC initiated by Ron May has been strengthened by the addition of Andy Yatsko to the RPC. And the process seems to be developing momentum. In fact, at an RPC meeting earlier this week, it became obvious that we need to quickly come to grips with the question of who would actually sign a lease with the Navy. The degree of interest in participating on the part of the SDSU administration is also being explored. One obvious possibility would be co-locating the repository and the South Coastal Information Center.

Once the situation regarding the NAVEX buildings becomes clearer, it will be possible, and necessary, to begin working specific tasks to specific deadlines, and the work done to date can begin to bear fruit.

REFERENCE CITED

- Royle, James W., Jr.
1992 The Role of an Avocational Society in the Curation Crisis, or What's a Nice Society Like You Doing with All that Money? Proceedings of the Society for California Archaeology 5:337-340.