



## ANNUAL REPORT: US (IL) - ARCHAEOLOGICAL CURATION 2021 FIELD SCHOOL

Director: Dr. Tamira K. Brennan, Section Head of Curation, Illinois State Archaeological Survey



*Students and staff of the IFR's inaugural archaeological curation field school, standing in front of a portion of the legacy collections that were inventoried and rehabilitated as part of the project.*

### **PART 1. RESEARCH OUTCOMES**

This inaugural season of the Archaeological Curation Field School took place at the Center for Archaeological Investigations (CAI) repository in Carbondale, Illinois and included a total of 10 students and 5 staff. The CAI holds ~10,000 ft<sup>3</sup> of archaeological collections from the Midwestern and Southwestern US, which were excavated from the early 1900s through present day and represent some of the earliest professionally excavated collections in the Midwest. The objectives of the 2021 field school were first to serve as an exemplary source of education in curation, the opportunities for which are few and far between, and second, to bring these otherwise unfunded collections up to minimum federal curation standards. This facilitates their use for research, education, and Tribal consultation. Achieving those standards included re-housing, inventory, and cross-indexing the collections, whose long and complicated curation

history makes them particularly challenging to work with. Through hands-on work, IFR students experienced (and overcame!) many of the trials of working with the types of collections they are likely to encounter if pursuing a career in curation or collections. Of equal importance, they learned how decisions made at *every* stage of an archaeological project might affect the condition and accessibility of the resulting collections. This resulted in making them advocates for good archaeological practice from field to finish.

In total, this work resulted in IFR students reuniting 49 boxes of orphaned materials with their “parent” collections and bringing 33 boxes of legacy collections up to modern curation standards through rehousing, inventory, and cross-indexing in a relational database. This work improved 200 accessions (!), which allows researchers, students, and Tribal stakeholders alike to easily explore this portion of the CAI’s legacy holdings. At the end of the field school, students were able to stare down the aisles at the tangible outcome of their hard work and to know that their personal contributions made a significant impact on the accessibility and accuracy – and therefore the research value – of those collections.

Students also participated in outreach, visiting a local community member with an important surface collection of Paleoindian through Mississippian era artifacts from the region. This collection was donated to the CAI, and students packed up, then sorted, cataloged, and labelled this 17-box donation as a means of participating in the front-end of the curation process while learning about the importance of collector-professional relationships.

As a matter of course, students also became familiar with the material culture of precontact and Colonial era southern Illinois and gained an introduction to the culture-history of the Midwestern US. Guest lectures by experts in these areas supplemented readings and discussions on curation, preservation legislation, and the role of curation in implementing the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The field school was even able to join a live Zoom meeting of NAGPRA practitioners for their discussion on the implications of proposed changes to that law.

As a bonus, students took field trips to several of the sites for which the CAI holds assemblages: the large Mississippian period mound sites of Kincaid (Brookport, Illinois) and Cahokia (Collinsville, Illinois) and the French Colonial town of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. Additional field trips to the Illinois State Museum and the Southern Illinois University Museum repositories offered a glimpse of curation at different scales and settings and the opportunity to talk with the Curators of Anthropology at each institution.

The research outcomes of this field school do not follow the traditional format of scientific field schools. The results of the field season enable research more than they constitute archaeological research itself – although the possibility for such exists, dependent on the collections selected for a particular field season. Given the unique format that this curatorial work took, the major contribution of 2021 IFR field school was proof of concept for a new way to train students in collections work, and one that was undoubtedly successful. To that effect, the Project Director will be leading a Society for American Archaeology Seminar in December 2021 on teaching curation that highlights this IFR field school, and a paper at that same organization’s annual meeting in April of 2022 that uses this field season as an illustration of a new way to combat the problems our field faces in curation.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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