

ARCHAEOLOGICAL STANDARDS

Technical Guidance for Archaeologists in the State of Michigan



Guide 7 | www.michigan.gov/archaeology/

Cataloging Standards Brief Fact Sheet

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The Michigan SHPO accepts curation of archaeological materials for projects conducted in Michigan in fulfillment of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. SHPO does not accept materials collected from other states or non-provenience collections. SHPO does not purchase artifacts collections.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I WANT TO DONATE A COLLECTION?

Contact Kate Frederick, frederickk1@michigan.gov or (888)522-0103, preservation@michigan.gov.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A CONSULTANT/DONOR, WHEN SUBMITTING COLLECTIONS TO THE STATE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE FILE?

Donations will be accepted if the consultant or donor has cleaned, cataloged, labelled, and packaged artifacts according to our standards. If you are making a donation on behalf of a landowner, written permission from the landowner must also be included with the transfer. SHPO is responsible for accessioning the collection and providing proper storage.

DEFINITIONS

Collection – all objects collected from a particular site during one project. Different phases or years of the same project should be separate collections.

Accession – Legal process involving change of ownership and/or possession when collections are accepted into an institution's holdings. In our system, all collections from the same project will be accessioned together. The "accession record" contains information about the accession. The "accession number" is entered in all catalog records, linking each item to the information about how it was acquired.

Catalog Number – unique number assigned to an object (or to a "lot" of similar objects. This number is written on the object, and also used as the ID number of the computer record for the object.

Lot – group of similar objects cataloged as a unit, using one catalog number. In our system, similar objects from the same provenience unit may be handled as a lot. For example, all undecorated whiteware body sherds from the same unit and level may be cataloged under one catalog number.

CLEANING RECOMMENDATIONS

Precontact material— Wash, but don't scrub.

Shell — handle with extreme care; brush with a delicate brush. Shell can come apart in water.

Charcoal or organic remains to be used for radiocarbon dating — do not wash; wrap loosely in tin foil packet. The tin foil can be labeled with a Sharpie.

Faunal remains—wash gently.

Floral remains— do not wash; if washed, should be handled by floral specialist.

Iron— dry brush with firm brush like a scrub brush (don't use metal brushes).

Glass and historic ceramics — can be scrubbed in water.

RECOMMENDED CATALOGING SUPPLIES

Use Sharpie Industrial Super Permanent marker, Extra Fine and Ultra Fine for labelling bags, and use Fine points for labeling boxes.

Use Liquid Label "white paint" and acrylic coating.

Artifacts should be in baggies with white label area. Use the appropriate sized bag for the object(s). Baggies should be at least 2 mil, prefer 4 mil. For large, heavy, or bulky baggies should be at least 4 mil.

Boxes should be standard banker sized (15 x 12 x 10" or 24 x 12 x 10"). Prefer acid-free archival material.

CATALOG NUMBERS

Always start the catalog number with the site number. Next comes a dot, then provenience numbers. Finally, a dash, then the unique number. The provenience numbers should always reflect the numbering used in any report and/or field records. Organize data in tables according to catalog numbers.

Examples:

20AA123.ST7-1 (site 20AA123, shovel test 7, item 1)

20AB33.ON15W.2-7 (site 20AB33, unit ON15W, level 2, item 7)

20AC4.S-8 (site 20AC4, surface, item 8)

20AD102.ON15W.F3-2 (site 20AD102, unit ON15W, feature 3, item 2)

WHICH MATERIALS SHOULD BE RETAINED OR DISCARDED?

Precontact Artifacts*	
Bone, Antler, Shell	Count, measure, and weigh all artifacts. Sort by species. Retain all.
Botanicals	Retain all artifacts. Sort and identify. Weigh and measure all formed tools
Fire Affected Rock/FCR	Weigh all, retain only a representative sample of rock material types, or any diagnostic pieces*
Daub	Weigh all; retain any with impressions significant to interpretations
Charcoal	Retain all samples having provenience data; discard any lacking provenience or compromised by contaminants
Soil	Retain all floated samples and a representative sample of unprocessed soil*
Historic Artifacts	
Brick	Weigh all, note reconstructed dimensions, retain all with maker's marks or other diagnostic features and a representative sample of those without
Coal/Slag	Weigh all; retain a predetermined sample
Daub	Weigh all; retain any with impressions
Lumber	Identify and record sizes present; retain unique or diagnostic specimens
Mortar	Retain any specimens with diagnostic features. Otherwise, note quantity and discard remainder.
Nails	Identify type and number of each type; retain a representative sample; discard remainder.
Shingle/Roofing Material	Weigh all; retain a representative sample of material types/colors.
Faunal (including shell)	Weigh and retain all. Sort by species and identify.
Botanical	Weigh and retain all diagnostic specimens.
Charcoal	Note presence, but do not collect or retain.
Soil	Retain all floated samples and a representative sample of unprocessed soil. But do not retain any soil samples lacking provenience information

*General rules:

All materials from precontact feature contexts should be retained (including FCR).

All diagnostic or unusual artifacts should be retained.

Any artifacts found in unusual contexts should be retained; for example, several pieces of slag found within a precontact feature.

Any questions on whether or not an artifact should be retained – contact SHPO archaeology staff at (888)522-0103 or preservation@michigan.gov.

ARTIFACT LABELING

Each unique object should be labeled with its complete catalog number. The number **MUST** be legible, but should also be as small as possible.

In the case of a lot, a few of the larger or more complete items in the lot should be labeled.

If an object is too small or fragile to label, the catalog number should be written on a tag attached to the object, or the object can be placed in a pill tin or glassine envelope, or small baggie and that can be labeled.

Dark surfaces, or very rough surfaces can be labeled by first using white Liquid Label to whiten a small spot, letting it dry, then writing on the white surface. Liquid label should always receive a final coat of acrylic to seal it.

Put the number in a place where it can be easily seen, but not on the surface most likely to be placed upward in an exhibit or photo. Do not obscure parts of the object that may need to be seen for study. For instance, label precontact ceramics on the interior surface, and do not cover any decoration.

ORGANIZATION OF ARTIFACTS INTO BAGS AND BOXES

Diagnostic artifacts, intact artifacts, artifacts suitable for display and research, should be given unique numbers and placed in an individual baggie. Examples: projectile points, drills, rimsherds, awls, coins, etc. These are the objects most likely to be used in future. If the collection is a large one, these items should be boxed separately.

Multiple items of the same kind from a single provenience unit can be cataloged by lot. No individual numbers should be used. Examples: 37 unmodified flint chips from 15N/10E, Level 1 can all be cataloged under one number. The lot should be bagged together.

Delicate items should always be bagged separately and may need protective packing materials, such as acid

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

If the donation is part of an academic study or Section 106 project, the artifacts must be accompanied by the following:

Final report (1 hard copy and digital version as a single PDF on a USB drive)

A complete inventory of artifacts must be included in the report.

Site forms must be completed for new or revisited sites ([michigan-terrestrial-site-form2.docx \(live.com\)](#)).

A printed complete inventory of artifacts organized by catalog number must be included in each bankers box.

Copies or originals of field notes, lab notes or other documentation created as a part of the project must be included in one of the boxes.