

A HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LOS ANGELES DISTRICT, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper will trace the development of archaeological research from the perspective of the Los Angeles District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was not until the mid-1970s that the Corps began a formal archaeological program. At that time, the Corps' idea of archaeological research involved excavation and storage. They did not want to pay for analyses or reports. This is no longer the case, and today's problems involve the lack of interpretative programs and adequate curation. The paperwork and bureaucracy can be maddening. The pressure to meet deadlines and the political pressure can be extreme, but the opportunities are there to determine the quality of the research that is conducted and make a significant contribution to the state of the art.

DISCUSSION

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for both military and civil works construction projects authorized by Congress. During the 19th century, the Corps played a vital role in the development of the West. They surveyed the routes for the early railroads and supervised their construction. For the past several decades, the Corps has been involved in massive flood control and navigation projects including the development of waterways, harbors, and dams, water control structures and reservoirs. The Los Angeles District came into existence in 1898 because of the Corps involvement with the construction of the Los Angeles Harbor (Turhollow 1975).

The Corps' formal archaeological program began in 1970 as an outgrowth of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. However, the Corps has a long history of archaeological involvement. During the 19th century the Corps' geographical surveys collected information and produced some of the earliest reports on archaeology

and ethnology. The Corps continued to record archaeological and ethnological data as a part of their geographical surveys until 1879 when these responsibilities were assumed by the newly created U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Ethnology (Banks 1988).

Prior to 1966, the Department of the Interior was responsible for the treatment of cultural resources that would be affected by Federal projects and activities. Archaeology for the Corps was conducted through the Interagency Archaeological Program, a loosely knit program administered by the Smithsonian Institution and the National Park Service (Banks 1988). Operating under the Reservoir Salvage Act of 1960, the National Park Service could only address nationally significant sites that would be impacted by the construction of dams and reservoirs. The Act did not contain provisions for funding, and the level of effort depended upon how much, if any, Congress would authorize for mitigation. The emphasis was salvage archaeology and funding was never sufficient.

With the enactment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, responsibility for cultural resources was given to Federal agencies having jurisdiction or control over those resources. In response, the Corps hired one person to oversee the archaeology program (Banks 1988). This person was stationed at Corps headquarters in Washington D.C. and was nominally responsible for the archaeological program for all 11 regional divisions and 38 districts.

In 1974, the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act was passed and as the direct result of this amendment to the Reservoir Salvage Act, the Corps began to hire additional personnel to manage the archaeological program. Since that date the staff has increased to approximately 70 nationwide. The Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974 recognized the importance of archaeological data as well as structures, objects, and sites, and expanded the protection provided by the Reservoir Salvage Act to include any alteration of the terrain caused as a result of any Federal construction or any federally licensed activity or program. Most important, it also authorized the Federal agency responsible for the project to expend up to 1% of the total project cost for data recovery.

In 1977, I became the first archaeologist to be hired by the Los Angeles District. At this time, archaeological studies were initiated by the Corps' environmental staff who contracted with local universities for archaeological services. The archaeological studies were used to provide the information needed for environmental impact statements, determining National Register eligibility, assessing effects, formulating and implementing archaeological mitigation programs, and coordinating these decisions and actions in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This arrangement was less than satisfactory because the environmentalists lacked the knowledge about archaeology, and the archaeologists lacked the knowledge about the environmental and historic preservation laws that were needed to determine the appropriate level of effort for the studies and to produce the documentation that was

needed for compliance.

This was a part-time position and I was working on my doctorate at University of California, Riverside. My head was filled with the ideals of the then new processual archaeology, but I had heard about some of the environmental atrocities perpetrated by the Corps of Engineers and other Federal agencies and I was sure that I would be asked to do something unethical and that I would have to resign very soon. I am certain that neither they nor I ever anticipated that by the early 1980 they would have a million-plus dollars per year archaeology program and a staff of 8 archaeologists.

Interestingly, the majority of today's environmental laws, including some noteworthy laws relating to archaeological preservation, were passed during president Nixon's administration in the late sixties and early seventies. As is the way with Federal bureaucracies, this pro-environment climate had began to trickle down to all but a few of the various Federal agencies. And by the time I was hired in 1977, the Los Angeles District was in the midst of expanding its environmental section and talking about not only living up to the letter, but the spirit of the laws. To my surprise, I was handed a stack of historic preservation laws and regulations and several project descriptions, and told, "Tell us what we need to do for compliance."

This was not to say that it was all clear sailing. At first, I was overwhelmed by the size of the District (it included all of southern California and Arizona), by the stack of regulations written in incomprehensible legalese, by the large number of projects in various stages of planning and construction, and by the time and funding pressures. Fortunately, I was soon able to hire some very bright and competent archaeologists to assist me and by the mid 1980s we were a team of 8.

At the time I was hired, the Corps' idea of archaeological research involved excavation and storage. There was some reluctance to pay for analysis or reports, and I encountered a lot of resistance from project managers who viewed archaeology as an im-

pediment to the real mission of the Corps. It took some time, but I was able to convince all but a few of the hard-liners that sound archaeological studies and appropriate mitigation measures would facilitate, rather than delay, the successful completion of their projects. As for the hard-liners, I was able to convince their bosses, so the worse they could do was remind me that this is the Corps of Engineers, not the Corps of Archaeologists.

Because I had one foot in academia and the other in CRM, I was acutely aware of the criticisms of contract archaeology. Primarily these revolved around the lack of sophistication and theoretical content of its research designs and the lack of analytical studies based on the data recovery programs. These problems can be attributed in part to:

1. The fact that the geographic extent and location of the study area is determined by the project and not by the research interest;
2. Time, funding, and contractual constraints;
3. The perception by the agency that archaeological research is an impediment to their real mission;
4. The time that must be expended on bureaucratic compliance requirements and contractual obligations;
5. The lack of continuity as different contractors are hired for different stages; and
6. The general piecemeal nature of CRM where each agency is operating within its own project area and there is no overall regional framework to guide research priorities, or integration of funding and ideas to maximize the research and preservation potential.

There are 3 main players involved in the Federal CRM research process: (1) the agency archaeologists who determine the level of effort and funding requirements for the research program; (2) the contract archaeologists who conduct the research program; and (3) the State Historic Preservation Officer and Advisory Council on Historic Preserva-

tion who review for historic preservation compliance.

To improve the performance of the agency archaeologists we sponsored attendance at the major professional archaeology and anthropology annual meetings and encouraged the completion of advanced degrees. Federal and state guidance on cultural resource management and archaeological procedures, research designs, eligibility, and site preservation were provided. Training in historic preservation laws and regulations, cost estimating, and contracting, brainstorming sessions were also important.

To improve the performance of the archaeological contractors, we required a research design for every phase of study. The request for proposals required the contractors to demonstrate their ability to identify data gaps, formulate and justify important research questions for the proposed project region, and identify the types of data and analyses that would be required to address the questions. An emphasis on the project region, rather than specific project area, helped to offset the narrow focus of the project area in the preparation of research designs. The scopes of work included requirements for presentations at professional meetings and filing of reports with the archaeological information centers and the National Technical Information System. Peer review panels were recruited for large, complex, or controversial studies. To maintain continuity, large open-end contracts were awarded for specific regions or projects that would allow us to issue delivery orders to the selected contractor for up to 2 years.

To facilitate the historic preservation compliance process we worked hard to maintain a good working relationship with the State Historic Preservation Office and Advisory Council staff. We coordinated informally with the SHPO and Council to make sure that there would be no surprises and subsequent delays because of lack of agreement, incorrect procedures, or inadequate documentation.

The impression by the agency that archaeological research is an impediment to their real mission was and is a difficult chal-

lenge that requires constant attention. Although we were initially successful in eliciting the cooperation of the various project managers, construction managers, planners, and decision makers, it was necessary to maintain a close working relationship and to keep a close tab on everything that could possibly affect an archaeological or historic property. We became experts in the Corps' multi-state planning process and planned our studies at the appropriate level of effort. When times were good, we took the initiative. We conducted brown bag lunch seminars on archaeology, attended status meetings, and impressed everyone with our mission to place the Corps in compliance with historic preservation requirements in a cost effective and timely manner, and to facilitate the successful completion of Corps projects. When, as was the usual case, we were buried in paperwork, had critical deadlines to meet, and failed to follow-up, we would lose our credibility and have to convince them all over again.

The problems inherent in the piecemeal and uneven nature of CRM, where each agency conducts its own narrow program, cannot be resolved without changes to the historic preservation laws and regulations. I would like to see the program changed so that an agency would be responsible for damage to all archaeological sites regardless of whether they meet the criteria for the National Register of Historic Places. Those that do would be the subject of a data recovery program, or other appropriate treatment. For sites that are not eligible for data recovery or other mitigation measures, the agency would be required to contribute to a regional or state fund to be used for curation, and for preservation and research for other endangered sites.

In the 1980s, the Los Angeles District was designated as a center of excellence for cultural resource management by the Environmental Advisory Board to the Chief of Engineers in Washington, D.C. The current Los Angeles District archaeological staff is committed to maintaining this level of excellence, but they are facing a whole new set of problems, challenges, and opportunities. The archaeological staff is greatly reduced with 4 full-time archaeologists and one part-

time student aide. Unfortunately, the workload has not been significantly reduced, and the pressure to meet deadlines and the political pressure to compress the studies and the compliance process has accelerated. The new problems and challenges include curation and repatriation.

Opportunities are present in the Federal Legacy Program. This program was created by the Department of the Defense Appropriations Act of 1991 (P.L. 101-511), and provides funds for the management and protection of natural and cultural resources which exist on lands held by the Department of Defense (DOD). The funds are awarded to the DOD agency and Legacy Partners (other Federal and State agencies, private organizations and volunteers) through a proposal review and granting process. To date, funding and staff time have not been available to address the curation problem or for compliance with the Federal standards and guidelines. Funding has been allocated for implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. An inventory of collections administered by the District will begin in 1993, with repatriation scheduled for 1995. The recently enacted Legacy Program could provide the additional funding needed for regional overviews and management plans, site protection projects, and curation. The catch is finding the time, dollars, and staff to prepare proposals and compete for these funds. The bottom line is that the District archaeologist will be hard pressed to meet these goals without additional staff.

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