

## APPENDIX E:

# STATE ARCHEOLOGICAL CO-OPS: THEIR EVOLUTION, DANGERS, AND VALUE

## A Commentary

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This article does not reflect an official Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation position. It results from a conversation between Acting Director Jerry Rogers and the author about archeological "cooperatives"—those bands of archeologists in various states that have as their purpose the regulation of archeological research. I will be speaking mostly to State Historic Preservation Officers, who I think seldom either use these groups well or guard against their dangers.

It may be that some archeological co-ops are formed to restrain trade, but I have never encountered such a pirate band. The groups I know have formed in response to pressures much like those that motivate preservation groups. Archeological sites are destroyed, and it dawns on archeologists that the only way to slow the destruction is through unified action. Group members may also be interested in similar kinds of research, so they can gain by sharing data and by standardizing methods of data collection.

Once the group is formed, it may evolve in two directions. It can be scholarly, dedicated to sharing research results, or it can be action oriented, setting research standards, influencing legislation, working with government, and going to court. Action groups share data, too, but this is not their primary purpose. It is with action cooperatives that I'll be concerned here.

### Territoriality

It does not take long for a cooperative to learn that sites are often bulldozed, not because construction agencies are run by blackguards but because of bad professional advice. Although several responses to this realization are possible, it is almost inevitable for the cooperative to begin setting standards, for recognition as a researcher and for research performance. This can be

both positive and dangerous. Territoriality runs deep in archeology's collective psyche, demanding defense of one's research turf. There are good reasons for territoriality—if you've done research in an area you probably deal with it better than others, and may need to collect specific data for your research. You've probably invested time developing relations with landowners, governments, planning departments, and historical societies that you'd rather not have upset by some klutz from the next state who breezes in to pluck a juicy contract, failing in the process to collect the data you need. When the territorial imperative leads a cooperative to decide that all contracts in Filmore County must go to Tom Twiddletrowel, however, the cooperative is treading on shaky legal ground and risking intellectual atrophy as well.

### Traditional vs New

A second danger results from the fact that during the last 15 years a major intellectual upheaval has occurred in archeology. To oversimplify: archeology was traditionally involved with the study of culture history represented by change in the forms of artifact assemblages. Big, long-occupied prehistoric sites provided relevant data. Small sites, sites with little complexity, and most historic sites were valuable. "New" archeologists tend to study settlement patterns, social systems, and economic systems at single points in history or prehistory and to study how these vary according to conditions. Their best data often come from little sites, and from the spatial relationships among sites. It is easy for a new archeologist to look on a traditionalist as a fuddy duddy who doesn't understand science. It is easy for the traditionalist to view the new archeologist as a brash upstart. When the new archeologist gets a survey contract—often obscenely large by the standards employed during the 1950's—and crawls around meticulously recording dinky sites, the traditionalist is likely to see this as a rip-off of the taxpayers' money. If a cooperative is dominated by traditionalists, it may adopt standards that exclude new archeologists; if it is dominated by new archeologists, it may adopt standards that send traditionalists off in a huff. I have never seen this problem solved by anything better than a truce in which all cooperative members pledge loyalty to common principles but regard one another with healthy skepticism.

If the cooperative does not fall into the territoriality trap and if it reaches detente among its epistemologies, it has to cope with money, which is needed for newsletters, secretarial help, legal fees, and the like. It is also faced with problems created by the infusion of federal money into archeology: agencies want advice, consultants want data, environmentalists want to know what to protest about. The cooperative soon finds itself running a clearinghouse—which requires more money. Meanwhile, how is it to enforce those standards it seeks to maintain? Obviously, by reviewing work done in the state and commenting on it—to the responsible archeologist, to the Society of Professional Archeologists, to sponsor agencies, to the SHPO, the Advisory Council, or OAH. This takes more time and money. Grants are not easy to get, so some cooperatives go into

contracting themselves, supporting their coordinative activities through overhead.

This naturally creates new pressures. The cooperative is in a tenuous position if it agitates for compliance with the preservation authorities, if it insists that high standards be maintained in compliance work, and if it offers to do the needed work for money. If the state archeologist, SHPO's archeologist or a contracting agency's archeologist are members of the cooperative, they may be placed in an entirely untenable position.

At this point—or before—many cooperatives decide they would rather not be activist, and their members disappear into their pits and strata. Some SHPOs no doubt say good riddance, but I believe this is short sighted. Until every SHPO has a large professional staff, every agency has professional oversight capability, and OAH and the Advisory Council are really able to effectively review agency actions, we will need the clearinghouse and watchdog roles that cooperatives can fulfill. Moreover, if SHPOs are to develop surveys and plans that protect and realize archeological research values, they need scholarly guidance and advice, cooperatives are ideal for this task. How, then, can SHPOs help a cooperative avoid pitfalls and realize its potential?

First, the SHPO can be an active participant in or advisor to the cooperative, and by so doing try to insure that the policies established by the cooperative are consistent with preservation principles. Second, the SHPO can involve the cooperative in state plan formulation and in conduct of the statewide survey, not simply as a data source but as a reimbursed participant. Standard setting, data sharing, and review—the basic functions of a cooperative—are appropriate parts of survey and planning, and there is no reason not to support the cooperative in doing them when funds are available. The SHPO can also encourage involvement of the cooperative in broad planning and review by federal agencies, again on a funded basis. This involvement should obviate the need for the cooperative to go into project-level contracting, thus eliminating conflicts of interest.

But what if the cooperative really is out to restrain trade, or is dominated by one narrow approach to archeology? No cooperative should be given carte blanche; the SHPO should insist on:

1. No exclusive territories—archeologists working in the same area should cooperate;
2. No discrimination based on theoretical differences;
3. No price fixing—standards must be set for work quality, not price;
4. Procedures that are consistent with those of OAH and the Advisory Council;
5. Periodic review of the cooperative's activities by OAH, and perhaps by the Society of Professional Archeologists.

With these controls over their natural tendency to become closed and self-defensive, I believe that archeological cooperatives can be important contributors to any state's historic preservation efforts.

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