

SPECIALIZED SKILLS AND PROCEDURES
FOR PATHOLOGY DOCUMENTATION,
PUBLICATION, AND DIGITIZED
COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT OF
INDIGENOUS BONE, TEETH,
AND ARTIFACT PHOTOGRAPHY

*Astrud Reed**



* *Museum Studies Masters Program, College of Liberal Studies, University of Oklahoma*

Abstract

This paper will propose standardized ethical treatment practices and high quality, yet efficient processing techniques in the photographic documentation and information management of indigenous skeletal remains and artifacts. Training manuals organized by museum type and size, as well as collection elements will be created. These will aid collection experts (managers and curators) in completing these processes that will include capturing publication worthy images during the research and documentation stages, while being excellent stewards of these sensitive collections.

Keywords (using various museum and archaeology indexes)

photodocumentation, information management, ethical treatment, indigenous curatorial practices



Introduction

Very little academic information exists on the photographic techniques used in anthropological skeletal and artifact documentation from indigenous peoples where accurate color, texture, and minute details are essential for proper identification and data interpretation in research and museum settings. Ancient skeletons and artifacts present additional challenges. Archaeological ethics must be employed that protect, preserve, document, and mediate between all applicable parties with the goal of perpetuating irreplaceable pieces and their history for future generations. (according to SAA Ethics in Archaeology Committee, 1996) Care should also be taken to restrict any damage or deterioration from handling, displaying, and harsh lighting methods. Current technologies allow collaborative work across disciplines, as well as on a regional, national, and global level. Clear digital images, accurate records and accessible research findings can then be inserted into other projects creating comprehensive macroscopic studies.

Handling, documenting, researching, and maintaining indigenous remains and artifacts not only introduces additional, more stringent, protocols, ethical indigenous treatment mandates an entirely different way of thinking. North American indigenous curatorial practices and curators have increased since the late 1960s (Lockyear, 2014), especially after the 1990 passing of NAGPRA (Native American Graves and Repatriation Act). But even with the increase of indigenous thinking through indigenous curatorial and research staff, creating a standard system that encompasses the beliefs and practices of all tribes is incredibly difficult. Ideally, museum and research staff will work very closely with the descendant tribe during every step of the process to create a respectful and accurately informative exhibit or research project.

This paper will look at standardizing the documentation and information storage process of museum and research collections containing indigenous skeletal remains and artifacts, no matter the size of the museum or specific pieces in the collection. (Although, addendums that address these differences can be created as the need arises.) To make this possible, detailed methodology and procedural guidelines will be created that discuss photographic presentation, and lighting techniques for accurate yet also visually appealing capture, proper handling of fragile and culturally sensitive pieces, preparation for exhibition and publication, and digitized collections management. My research includes work with various biological anthropology,

ethnology, and archaeology collections housed at the University of Oklahoma to photograph the projects, and learn the needs and challenges of the researchers. Internships, interviews, and visits to museums were also conducted in coordination with museum curators and collections managers at the University of Oklahoma Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, and the Southern Plains Indian Museum (overseen by the national Indian Arts and Crafts Board.)

