

Special Points of Interest:

The Fall FOSA Newsletter is our second since the onset of the pandemic. As you no doubt realize, opportunities for fieldwork have been limited but FOSA and the Office of State Archaeology have nonetheless accomplished a remarkable amount over the summer and into the early fall months, as we think you will find reflected in this issue. *Jerry Tolchin, FOSA Newsletter Editor.*



FRIENDS OF THE OFFICE OF STATE ARCHAEOLOGY, INC.

Member Newsletter



President's Letter

Greetings,

I hope this newsletter finds you and yours well during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

Disruption of our lives by the pandemic has been extensive and for many of us severe. For FOSA, the greatest impact has been in our ability to provide opportunities for you to participate in archeological activities. While not on a par with the health, employment and social separation issues many are facing, the loss of archaeological activities has been missed by many. Be assured that FOSA will offer activities within the virtual arena as they become available and is prepared to conduct in-person activities when it is possible to safely do so.

One positive sign for the resumption of FOSA activities is the current support of the OSA at excavations at the Prudence Crandall site in Canterbury. Managing attendance and creating appropriate COVID-19 protocols has been successful in our first extended field work. We will continue to refine this system in the hope of using it as our COVID-19 standard operating procedure next season.

Lastly, I would like to express my personal sympathies to the family and friends of Dr. Don Rankin. Don's death is a great loss to the many groups and organizations he supported. He will truly be missed. Please see the tribute to Don Rankin on page 5 and 6.

Continued on page 2, top.



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For qualified purchases, a portion of your purchase (.5%) will be donated to the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology, CT. You may register for this program at www.smile.amazon.com

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President's Letter *(continued from page 1)*

Excavating the FOSA Website

Miss the thrill of uncovering a new artifact or making a new discovery? While we are limited in our outside the home activities, you might want to consider "excavating" the FOSA website.

The FOSA website was designed and is maintained by member Jim Hall. The site contains information about the organization, information and images of past projects, upcoming archeological events/excavations, research aids and links to sites of interest. Additionally, episodes of the iCRV's *Archaeology Of Connecticut* show are available at the site, including episodes no longer archived at iCRV.

Visiting and exploring just might result in the "thrill" of a new online discovery

You may visit the website at: <http://www.fosa-ct.org>.

Scott Brady, FOSA President



News from the Office of State Archaeology Greetings FOSA members:

While the pandemic certainly made for an atypical summer field season, we were able to do more field visits and projects in August and September, and some more extensive fieldwork in October. At the end of July, OSA visited Ivoryton for a walk-over of Essex Land Trust property that once held the ivory drying houses and factory of the Comstock Cheney Ivory Works. We will be working with the Essex Land Trust and NRCS to do a GPR survey of the area in October, to see if there are any extant subsurface features related to the former company's operations. We also conducted a walkover of the Franklin Johnson Mansion property in Wallingford, which is home to the American Silver Museum. Boy Scouts doing a renovation project on their privy building found a number of artifacts, and Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust is interested in learning more about the archaeological potential of the property. OSA will work with them to do a GPR survey of the property on November 5, to determine if there are subsurface features in the yard.

OSA completed a few small archaeological projects this summer with the help of a limited number of volunteers to ensure we could maintain social distancing and keep everyone safe. In August we conducted a small archaeological survey at the Stanton-Davis Homestead in Pawcatuck, prior to the installation of an underground electrical line. The property has a terraced front yard, and two of the pits we excavated there yielded an interesting array of materials from the 17th-19th centuries, including ceramics, animal bone, kaolin pipes, glass, nails, and other materials. The deposits appear stratified and suggest great potential for intact 17th- and 18th-century components at the site.

In August and September OSA did some excavation work in the front yard of the Eliza Freeman House in Bridgeport. The house is one of the last two remaining structures associated with the 19th century "Little Liberia" neighborhood, a thriving, free African-American community with Black-owned homes, businesses, churches, a library, and a hotel. Restoration work is planned for both houses soon, and our goal was to help the Mary and Eliza Freeman Center figure out how the original porch was constructed.

Continued on page 3,



News from the Office of State Archaeology *(Continued from page 2)*

We were able to determine the original configuration of the porch, and we found a few 19th century artifacts in the fill around the porch, including buttons, pipe stems, and some ceramic sherds, but these were mixed with a lot of late 20th century materials.



Freeman House Porch Excavation



Freeman House Excavations

Finally, starting in mid-October and continuing into this month, OSA and FOSA are helping the Prudence Crandall Museum in Canterbury with a small excavation for the installation of some drainage features in the yard. So far, we've found evidence of the earlier excavations carried out at site in 1981, as well as some interesting artifacts and soil layers.

In the upper fill layer we found some 19th century ceramics like pearlware, machine-cut nails, and three slate pencil fragments. These may date to the period of Prudence Crandall's school in the 1830s. We also found what may be a large fireplace cleaning episode containing a concentration of gray ashy soil with lots of charcoal and artifacts including English white salt-glazed stoneware, lots of kaolin pipe stems, hand-wrought nails, and burned animal bone. The artifacts in this deposit suggest it pre-dates the existing house (ca. 1805), and was likely associated with an earlier house on the property.



Slate Pencil Fragment



Volunteers Working Test Pits at Crandall School

Continued on page 4, top.

Out of the field, the staff of the Connecticut Museum of Natural History (CSMNH) has been working with OSA and Dr. Jackie Veninger-Robert, UCONN’s Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Coordinator, to establish a new, comprehensive database for OSA, CSMNH, and NAGPRA collections. The long-term goal is to have a database that will house all of our information and permit researchers to access aspects of the data online. It will probably take several months to build the database, and then several years to enter all of the data, but in the end, it should provide us with an incredible resource and a new and better way of organizing our vast collections. I’m very excited about it!

Things have also been moving along in the new lab. I’ve organized the lab library, comparative collections, and slides, and I’m working on organizing the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) reports. It is gratifying to finally be getting some lab work done. We have a UConn undergraduate and FOSA member, Joshua Duvall, who is volunteering a couple of days a week to wash artifacts, permitting us to process some of the material OSA excavated this summer. Additionally, we have a graduate student Research Assistant, Brianna Rae, who is working remotely to inventory some of the materials from this summer, as well as continuing to work on the Hills House assemblage from 2019. This month, we finally got the remaining Ridgefield individuals to Dr. Gary Aronsen at Yale for analysis. Their labs are now only open on a limited basis, so it will probably take a while to get the remains analyzed.

I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy and I look forward to a time when we can all meet in person again!

Dr. Sarah Sportman, Connecticut State Archaeologist

NEW FOSA MEMBERS SINCE 3/4/2020

Kathleen Boushee

Rachel Brady

Krysten Civitelli

Alicia Johnson

Yvette Johnson

Eric and Elizabeth Jones

Wade Laboissoniere

Sean Heather K. McGraw

Lucinda McWeeney

Michael Murphy

Julia Tillinghast

Zsuzsa Jugl

Beginning in late March 2020, we have introduced and fine-tuned electronic membership services on the FOSA website. This allows new and renewing members to enter their membership information and volunteer activity preferences, and to pay via PayPal if desired. Since the introduction of this service, approximately 38% of renewals and new memberships have come through the website. We expect a higher percentage of members to use this service going forward.

Don Rankin
In Remembrance



Photo by Bonnie Beatrice

Most likely the first thing you noticed when you asked Don Rankin a question was the huge smile that would appear on his face and the sparkle in his eye. It didn't matter the topic of the query: geology, archaeology, natural history, chemistry, physics, astronomy, history, Native American culture, etc., Don usually had the knowledge to answer. If Don didn't know something about the topic, which was rare, you knew that by the next time he met you he would have a wealth of information. The second thing you might notice was his contagious enthusiasm. You had no choice but to be carried away into the subject with an interest you might not have known you even had. Thirdly, you would become aware of his encyclopedic knowledge. He was brilliant and had the charisma to share the breadth of his knowledge with others and to get them excited in what he was excited about.

He was a natural teacher. Ranger Russ Miller of The Meigs Point Nature Center recalled: "He would get up in front of a group of people and just say, 'Oh, this is so fantastic. This is so amazing. You guys are going to be so excited to learn about this' and with his energy and enthusiasm everybody was on the edge of their seats before he even started talking." He had a photographic memory and could give you details that would blow you away. And, yet, as brilliant as he was, he never made you feel that your opinion was less important.

The archaeological and Connecticut Native American communities lost a benefactor and dear friend when Dr. Donald Rankin of Madison passed away on August 28, 2020. Don was a Renaissance man. His knowledge was eclectic. His passion was infectious. His friendship was warm. He was a lot of things to a lot of people. We all wanted to be in his presence and share in his love of life, family and community.

Don Rankin graduated from Colgate University, received his Doctor of Medicine at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, trained in surgery at Yale New Haven Hospital and operated at Bridgeport Hospital. He was a veteran, serving in the U.S. Air Force at Castle Air Force Base in California as a general surgeon and earning the rank of Captain. Retirement did not imply a rocking chair for Don, as his life was just as action-packed as his career. The list of civic groups he championed and supported within the Madison community and beyond is enormous including Habitat for Humanity, Friends of Hammonasset State Park, Meigs Point Nature Center, Friends of the Office of State Archaeology (FOSA), Bushy Hill Nature Center, St. Andrews Episcopal Church, E.C. Scranton Memorial Library, A Place Called Hope and the list goes on....

Fortunately for the archaeological community, Don met Gary Nolf, former president of FOSA and atlatl expert. Together they developed the “Archaeology Roadshow,” touring museums, libraries, historical societies and festivals in southeastern Connecticut promoting archaeology and Native American history. He and Gary started archaeology clubs at Madison and Westbrook High Schools and led the students on numerous hikes and digs. In recognition of this special relationship and the support Don has given to FOSA over the years, he was cited for a special award at its Annual Meeting on March 24, 2018.

Don was also a co-founder of the very successful annual Native American Festival at Hammonasset State Park. The man was a doer, an organizer and a people person, not an armchair academic, but a man on the front lines. He could be seen late at night selling Christmas trees along Route 1 to raise funds for the Friends of Hammonasset State Park (he never missed a day); running around the open field headed for exhibitors, seeing to their last minute needs at the Native American Festival; leading a hike through the woods with students in hand; lecturing to a group on an icy “First-Day” morning at Hammonasset Beach State Park or tossing an atlatl demonstrating ancient hunting techniques. Gary Nolf tells a story related to him by his pharmacist that Don had noticed he was having difficulty tying his Christmas tree to his car roof during one of the funding raising drives. Don approached the pharmacist and offered to personally deliver the tree to his house, which he did!

He traveled the state lecturing and demonstrating to adults and children alike, about Native American practices, beliefs, culture and life, promoting a deep understanding and respect for Native Americans. Don was so active and energetic that it was difficult for the rest of us to keep up with him even as he approached his eighth decade. After meeting Don Rankin, you could never forget him.

That was the public side of Don, but his real devotion was to his family, of which he was so proud. His wife and childhood sweetheart Nancy, his children, Craig and Laura Rankin of Seattle, Washington, Elizabeth Rankin of Guilford, and John and Karen Rankin of Madison; and six beloved grandchildren. Our hearts extend out to all of them in their loss.

You know, some ancient cultures believed that a man would never die as long as his name was remembered. And, if that is the case, Don Rankin will live forever!

Gary Nolf, Nick Bellantoni and Jerry Tolchin



Don lecturing to a group of high school students at MPNC. *Photo: Jerry Tolchin*



Don demonstrating the use of the Atlatl at MPNC *Photo: Jerry Tolchin*



Gary Nolf with Don Rankin at First Day Celebration at MPNC *Photo : Bonnie Beatrice*



Gary presenting Don with achievement award at the FOSA Annual Meeting *Photo Jerry Tolchin*

My Pandemic Project – Growing Old in Wethersfield

By Lee West

For many, the pandemic has sadly brought illness, economic hardship and isolation. For the more fortunate among us, the many hours at home have also brought opportunity. Most archaeologists have been kept away from dig sites and labs. But what if your home is a dig site?

My latest round of archaeological research was inspired by the need for a garden shed. New overhead doors on our century-old garage sparked my wife Carol's idea that perhaps, for the first time in 30 years, we might park a car in the garage. Except for all the stuff in there. Even after a good cleanout, there was still too much stuff. And so, we needed a shed.

Our house, officially the c. 1750 Ebenezer Talcott House in Wethersfield - Site #115-11, is known to have had a barn and probably other outbuildings since the 18th century and maybe earlier, though we had found no archaeological evidence of them. The proposed garden shed could possibly wind up on top of some very interesting structural remains. Archaeological Society of Connecticut (ASC) Board Member Dave Leslie generously offered his expertise along with a drone and ground-penetrating radar to see if there were traces of former structures in the back yard. His radar scan, conducted just before the pandemic lockdown, showed an anomaly at 0.8 to 1.5 meters below the surface near the site of the shed that looked vaguely rectangular and suspiciously like a cellar hole. Now working remotely because of COVID-19, he coached me on the best location for a meter-wide trench to find out what it was.



Aerial photo showing the GPR scan on the left at a depth of 1.5m with the trench location in red, and on the right the garage, with the cars waiting patiently outside.

Thus, with time on my hands and a mystery to be solved, I laid out a 1 x 2 meter grid and began my methodical excavation, hoping for evidence of old barnyard surfaces and footings or even a cellar, with the ultimate intent of going down to 1.5 m if need be. However, there was limited time if the shed was going to arrive and the long-suffering cars gain their shelter in the garage before snow flew.

As often happens in archaeology, you don't find what you were looking for, but if you are lucky you encounter something just as interesting. And so it was here. Right from the surface there was a light scatter of early 20th century artifacts overlying an equally light scatter of 19th century. These petered out toward the A-B horizon at about 45-50 centimeters below the surface (cmbs). Below this was sterile silty sand, and so the underlying anomaly appeared to be natural. At about 110 cmbs at the edge of the anomaly, I encountered a very hard dry packed natural clay layer and this is perhaps what the GPR had picked up.

However, there was something else on the way down to the sterile subsoil. A trash pit had been dug starting about 10 cmbs and down into the sterile subsoil to about 50 cm. In it was coal ash and clinker, ferrous remains including some intact tin cans, and many broken and intact bottles and ceramics. Based on the density of the debris, the nesting of broken plates and the absence of soil in the pit, it appeared that the trash had been accumulated over an extended period in some container such as an ash or garbage barrel, and then dumped all at once.



Lower part of trash pit feature



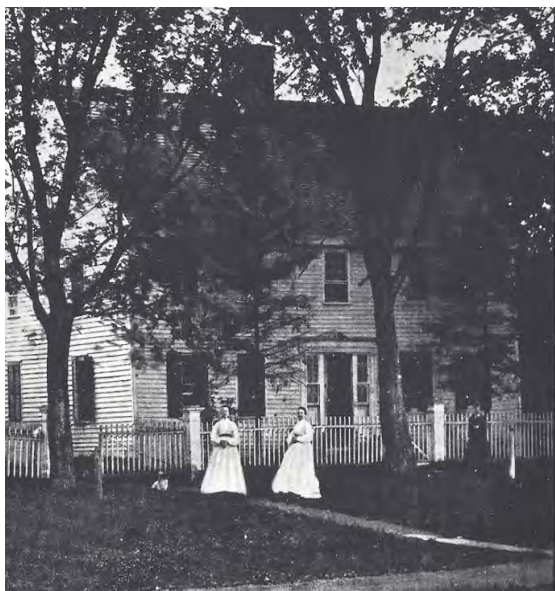
Sampling of the intact bottles from the trash pit feature

I have only just begun the detailed analysis of the contents of the trash pit feature, focusing on the intact glass bottles. The number which have survived intact is quite remarkable. At least two have traces of their original contents and one still has a readable paper label.

The feature contains 37 intact glass bottles. Of these 32 were embossed or labeled revealing their contents. Of the total, 27 (73%) were medicine or health-related, and some of the unmarked bottles in addition may have contained medicine. The types of medicine that appear to have been used most commonly were for headache and upset stomach. Furthermore, most bottles could be dated based on the manufacturer and type from the late 19th and early 20th century.

My current working *terminus post quem* (earliest possible date) is 1914, but based on a variety of factors, the pit was not likely to have been filled much later than 1920. So, this snapshot of life in the Ebenezer Talcott House falls into a fairly narrow window. Based on family research and confirmed by the 1910 and 1920 censuses, only one person lived in the house at that time, Sarah Isabella “Belle” Robbins, who was age 79 in 1920. So, in all probability, this trash represents consumption by one person over a limited span of time. Archaeologists normally study debris of the past. To be able to assign material to one person and date is unusual.

Other than the evidence that she was sickly, what else do we know about Belle? She moved into the house about 1849 with her parents, Henry and Celia (Talcott) Robbins, when she was about 8 years old. The only photo I have found probably including Belle was taken about 1862 when she and her parents are believed to be pictured in front of the house. Henry died about 1870 and her mother Celia in 1886. Belle never married. She may have had occasional boarders including some cousins, though they never show up in census records. Otherwise, she lived alone in the house from 1886 until 1925, when at age 84, she sold the house and went to live with relatives. Belle’s solitary life as an elderly woman is certainly a situation that resonates with us today.



Ebenezer Talcott House c.1862, from Stiles History of Ancient Wethersfield

What else do these remains tell us of Belle's lifestyle? There are ceramics which I have not yet evaluated, though at first glance they are consistent with this time period. There are remains of many tin cans, none with identifiable labels, but a few with surviving shapes that we would today associate with ham and evaporated milk.

Also of interest is what is NOT in the trash feature. There are very few food-related bottles, although some broken mason jars were noted. There is one ketchup bottle and several which might have contained flavoring extracts. There are no liquor, wine or beer bottles. Belle Robbins could well have been a teetotaler; during this era the temperance movement and Prohibition were at a height. Of course, some patent medicines contained a considerable amount of alcohol.

There is no dark soil indicative of food scraps or other organic waste, and no bones. The lack of potentially smelly food waste supports my theory that this was an accumulation of non-perishable waste and ashes, perhaps kept in a barrel not too far from the coal stove which was documented to once be in the kitchen.

There was one bone nearby, located in its own feature close to the trash feature, buried in the subsoil with its own stain of darker soil surrounding it. This is a neatly sawn humerus of a cow. Its presence here could well be the work of a family dog. While we have no evidence that Belle Robbins kept a dog, we do know that the next occupant of the house, Frances Welles had a dog.

In a story with strong parallels to Belle Robbins, Frances Welles at the age of about 31 moved into the house when her father bought the place in 1925. When her father died in 1929, she inherited the house and with the exception of a few boarders, she lived alone there until she reached the age of 88, at which time she sold the property just a year before she died.

A photo taken during Frances' occupancy shows a grainy picture of a terrier-like dog labeled Geoff dated 1940. We found further evidence of Geoff in the basement. When we first moved into the house in 1990, we found a 44" x 33" x 20" slatted wood shipping crate, padlocked closed with key missing, and with an enameled steel water dish on a rope still inside. Penciled on the top was: "To Miss F. S. Welles, Hartford, CT, My name is Geoff, I am only a dog – please be kind." Geoff was likely shipped to Miss Welles by rail, and one wonders how long a journey it was for him.

I could not bring myself to break-up Geoff's box, and so in true Yankee fashion, we have turned it into a work table and so it remains today, as a reminder of another occupant of this house. Now, when my pandemic project has uncovered a long-buried bone, it's fun to think that this might be another gift from Geoff.

With thanks to David Leslie for his site scanning and expert remote coaching, I have been fortunate to find an opportunity despite COVID-19 to use archaeology to tell an otherwise lost story of the past.



Geoff's shipping crate, still with the water dish.

Note: A previous version of this article appeared in the newsletter of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut, ASC News #254, September 2020.

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What's New on the FOSA Website?

1. We've continued to record the "Archaeology of Connecticut" interviews given at iCRV radio, and to incorporate them website with brief overviews of the subjects, into the website, at http://www.fosa-ct.org/iCRV_Slideshow_1.htm. At this writing (late September), 21 shows have been identified thru November, 2020 (one show had to be rescheduled due to power failures associated with Tropical Storm Isaias).

2. The online registration and payments supports, which were activated earlier this year, have been upgraded a bit as a result of user feedback; and usage continues to grow.

3. Although there was no full Annual Meeting this year (business portion and guest speakers) due to the COVID-19, the business portion was held via ZOOM video conference. A recording of the meeting, can be accessed via the "Annual Meetings" page at https://www.fosa-ct.org/FOSA_AnnMeetings.htm. From there you can also access images of the participants, an overview of the topics, and information on this year's Certificate of Appreciation recipients, Richard Hughes and Dreda Hendsey (who received a special award).

4. In June the New Canaan Library hosted 3 webinars on "Exploring Connecticut Archaeology." Links to these have been added to the "Selected YouTube Videos" page (which contains both YouTube videos and other recordings) at the bottom of page https://www.fosa-ct.org/FOSA_YouTube.htm.

5. An informational video on COVID-19 by FOSA member Don Rankin, has been posted at the top of the FOSA Home page. Don, a valued member of FOSA for many years, passed away in late August of this year.

6. On being advised by Lee West that the Archaeological Society of CT (ASC) has completed scanning all of their latest Newsletters and added them to their online archives, we'll no longer be storing copies of them on the FOSA website. For those interested in reading these, they're available at [ASC Archives](#).

7. **SUGGESTIONS REQUESTED:** To reiterate from above and from previous "What's New..." articles: While the web site has many things on it, it's very possible that there are dozens of other things which haven't crossed either my mind or that of the Board which might be included.

SO: If you have ideas or suggestions for layout changes, or new features, or changes to existing ones, or things we should drop, please let me know! Please email me at jamesh52@comcast.net with your suggestions.

Jim Hall

Archaeological and Historical Collections: A National Crisis

by Nicholas Bellantoni, Ph.D., Connecticut State Archaeologist (Emeritus)
(reproduced with permission of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation)

A few years ago, the phone rang and the caller told a story of her father's passing. In finalizing his estate she found a "ton of boxes with rocks" in them. The father was a known collector of Indian stone tools, and even tried his hand at knapping arrow points himself. She informed me that the boxes were going to the town dump unless my office wanted them. Not knowing anything about the collection, we ran over to the house to inspect the artifacts. We only had the time to go through a couple of boxes and really saw nothing impressive; however, we decided to take the materials back to our Museum of Natural History and Archaeology Center and see if any of them could be used for educational or exhibit purposes. As students and volunteers from the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology began cataloguing and identifying the artifacts they discovered about ten finely carved stone knives and projectile points that were more than 11,000 years old. These represented Native American cultures from the western portions of the continent—significant and one-of-a-kind items.



This incident illustrates how archaeological collections, including Native American and Colonial artifacts, are being lost every day, when collectors die without making provisions for the materials. The family views the collection as a personal hobby and do not think that it could be of importance—unless, of course, they perceive a monetary value. But, usually the collection is simply perceived as “boxes with rocks” and goes to the town dump.

When the office of the State Archaeologist was established by state legislation in the late 1980s, one of my initial efforts was to create public awareness that there was professional and scientific archaeology happening in Connecticut and that it was significant and could contribute to our understanding of our cultural heritage. And, as importantly, worthy of preservation!

What is important is not simply the artifacts themselves, but also their context. 'Context' in archaeological collections refers to the precise location where an artifact is found on a site and its relationship with other artifacts, such as its position in the soil layers of an excavation. This is a crucial aspect of archaeological artifact analysis and is an important dimension of the significance of archaeological collections. The loss of provenance and context in archaeological artifacts seriously diminishes their value as sources of information.

When we have good context for a collection, it can be very useful in research projects and the solving of hypotheses about our cultural past. But even collections that lack specific information about context and provenance, can be used for comparative purposes or for educational exhibits. So, every collection can contribute to our understanding of history.

Since the success of the PBS series, “Antiques Roadshow,” people have become more attuned to the potential of monetary reward for historic items. We all love the program, but it does a disservice to historic preservation efforts when items of Native American, Colonial and Historic origins are seen as being merely worth money. Appraisals of furniture and paintings are one thing, but appraisals of Indian pottery, Revolutionary and Civil War artifacts, and other significant American cultural items that can be recovered from archaeological contexts only hurt preservation efforts. Revolutionary and Civil War soldier burials have been vandalized in Connecticut to recover buttons, buckles, swords, guns, etc. that could be sold.

Archaeological sites and collections are like an endangered species: once lost, forever lost. They belong to all of us and should be maintained in appropriate repositories and available for educational and research purposes. We do not want to see them lost or vandalized due to attitudes of insignificance or profit.

The Office of the State Archaeologist is available to evaluate legal and ethical considerations in assuring that private archaeological collections are preserved for future generations, and can provide suggestions for owners of collections to use in their estate planning. We can help make the collections accessible to the public and assure that crucial data about where the objects were collected is not lost. Please do not hesitate to contact Office of State Archaeology (osa.uconn.edu/#) or other museum curators for assistance.

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- Exhibit Planning/Art Work
- Photography: Sites, Artifacts, Drones



We would like to hear from YOU! Please send your comments and ideas related to FOSA or the FOSA Newsletter to the Editor: Jerry Tolchin, at jerrytolchin@sbcglobal.net

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