

# Archaeology Collections at the NY State Museum

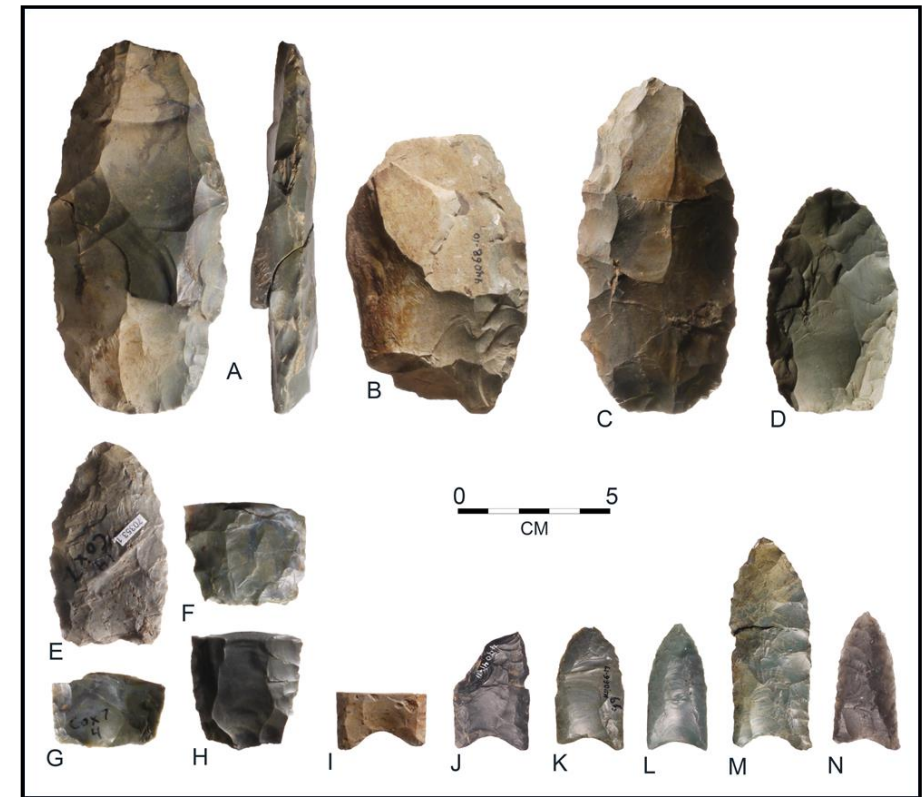
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**Jonathan C. Lothrop, Ph.D.**  
**Curator of Archaeology**



# NYSM Archaeology Collections

- Artifacts left by peoples of NY over the last 13,000 years
- Ice Age through early 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- Native American peoples, Colonial & later populations



West Athens Hill site  
Greene County  
Paleoindian stone artifacts  
13,000-12,500 years before present



# NYSM Archaeology Collections

- 5 million artifacts & specimens
- Material record that provides unique insights on the human past of New York
- Curated for all New Yorkers



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Educational Programs

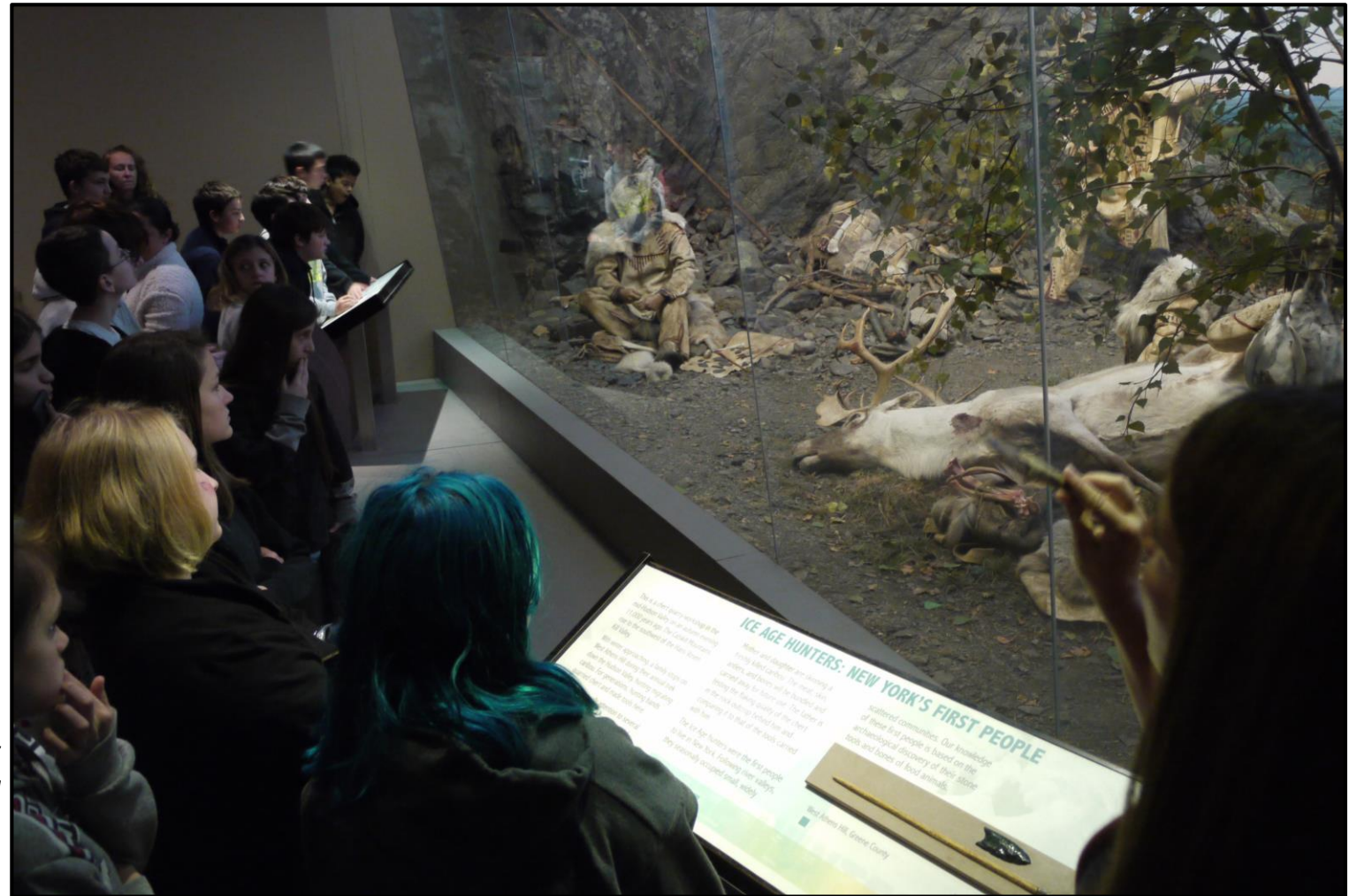
- Educational programs for visiting students (NYS Learning Standards-Social Studies)
- ***People of the Longhouse:***  
4<sup>th</sup> Graders



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Educational Programs

- Educational programs for visiting students (NYS Learning Standards-Social Studies)
- **Native Peoples:**  
7<sup>th</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> Graders

*Ice Age Hunters exhibit  
Native Peoples Hall  
(based on West Athens Hill site  
excavation)*



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Educational Programs

- Educational programs for visiting students
- Kahnawake Survival School (Mohawk reserve, Quebec)



El Rancho-style Pipe  
Ostungo site  
Montgomery Co.  
ca. AD 1475-1525



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Exhibits

## Fort Orange Site Collection

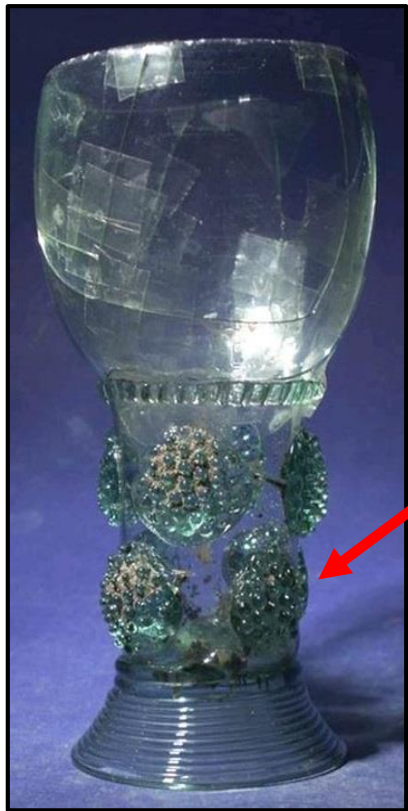
- Fort Orange trading post: 1624-1664
- State Historic Trust excavations, 1970-1971
- 1<sup>st</sup> urban archaeological site in Albany
- 2016 transfer of 30,000 artifacts to NYSM



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Exhibits

## Fort Orange Site Collection

- Exhibit: May 2018



*Roemer wine glass,  
17<sup>th</sup> C. site, Amsterdam*



*Roemer wine glass  
stem, Fort Orange  
collection*





# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Loans for Exhibit

## *“Community and Continuity: Native American Art of New York”*

- Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, SUNY New Paltz, 2018

Decorated potsherd,  
Esopus territory,  
ca. AD 1300-1400



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Loans for Exhibit

## “On the Trail of the Iroquois”

- Bonn & Berlin, Germany, 2013-2014



31 Rimsherd of a ceramic vessel with representational design  
Seneca (attributed), unidentified site in Livingston, Monroe, or Ontario County, New York, U.S.A., 1600–1640  
Fired clay, 5.5 × 5.5 cm  
Rock Foundation, on loan to the Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, NY, cat.no. 6832/177

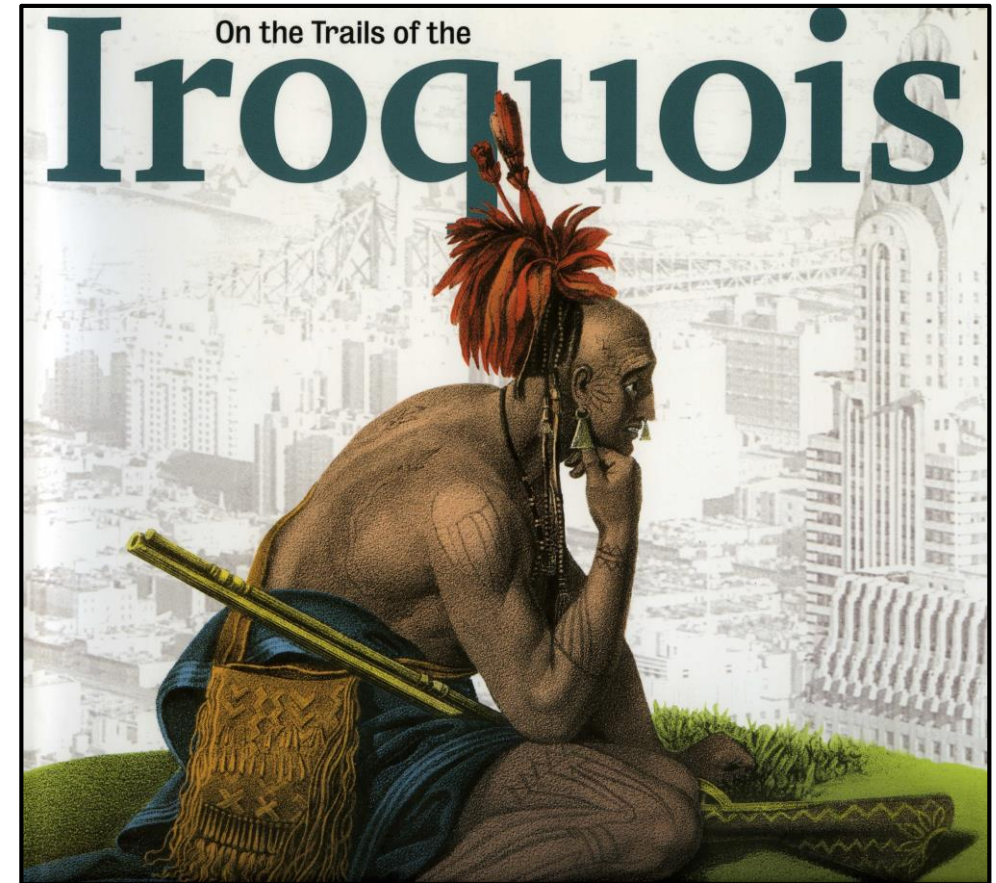
For the archaeologist the analysis of the ever-changing combinations of stylistic features of Iroquois pottery provides an important tool for the reconstruction of Iroquois history in pre- and protohistoric times. Apart from the widespread and typical incised geometric decorations, Seneca pots also featured appliqué figures of humans or animals like the face seen on one of the rimsherds on display. C.F.

Traditional Iroquois pottery included collared pots and uncollared jars. This collared specimen displays the “traditional” characteristics of horizontal and oblique incised line decoration on the collar, along with castellations (high points) on the rim. J.C.L.

33 Pot with strap handles  
Seneca, Dann site, Monroe County, New York, U.S.A., ca. 1660–1675  
Fired clay, 12 × 16 cm  
New York State Museum, Albany, NY, cat.no. A-20938

During the seventeenth century refugee Indian groups from other regions were sometimes adopted into Iroquois settlements. The “foreign” features on this pot—strap handles and clay tempered with crushed shell—are typical of the sixteenth-century Fort Ancient culture in the Ohio Valley. This offers strong evidence that Native Americans of this heritage, perhaps Shawnees displaced from the Ohio Valley by war, came to reside at the Dann site. J.C.L.

32 Collared pot  
Oneida, Beecher Blowers site, Madison County, New York, U.S.A., ca. 1595–1620  
Fired clay, 18 × 16 cm (base reconstructed)  
New York State Museum, Albany, NY, cat.no. A-2009.35V.99.4

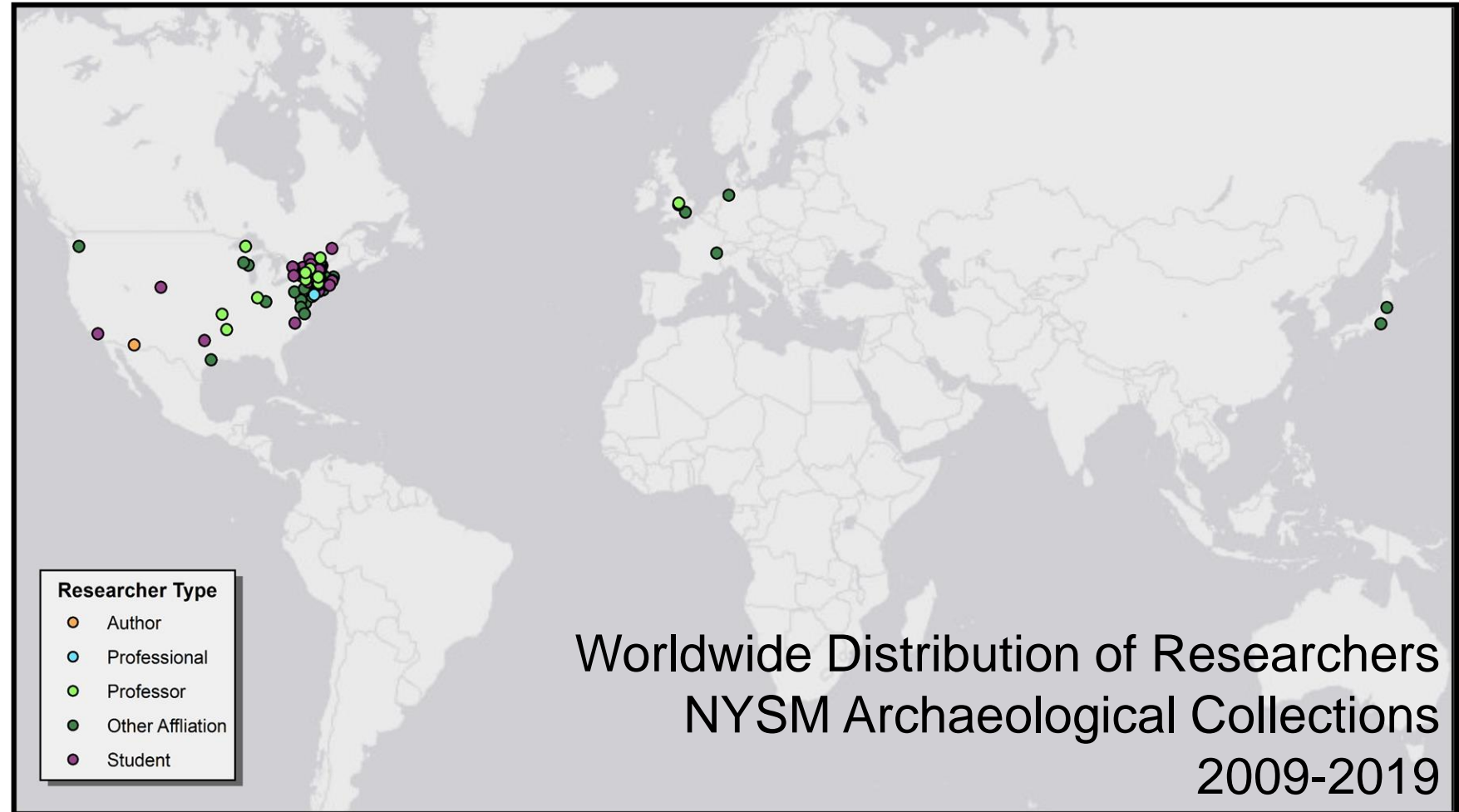


Catalog



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Research

- NYSM archaeological collections support studies by researchers from NY, Northeast & beyond
- Professional & student archaeologists, general public
- 126 researchers since 2009



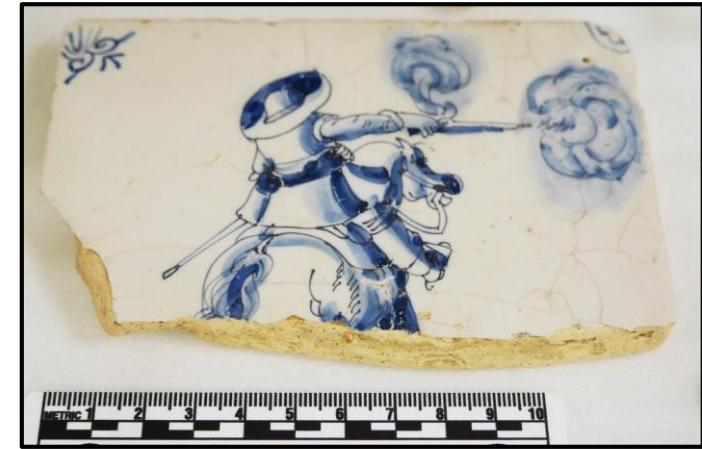
# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Research

Jessica Nelson, Brown U.

- Doctoral research (2017-18) on material culture of the 17<sup>th</sup> C. Dutch colonies in Albany & Manhattan



Tobacco pipes



Delft tile



Wine bottle



Antler & bone knife handles



Earthenware bowl



# Uses of Archaeology Collections: Research

NYSM - UAlbany Doctoral  
Fellows in Archaeology



Jessica Vavrsek: Social network analysis  
of Northern Iroquoian pottery  
Jefferson County



John Garbellano: Reinvestigation of Dogan Point  
~7000-year-old shell midden site, Hudson River  
West Chester County

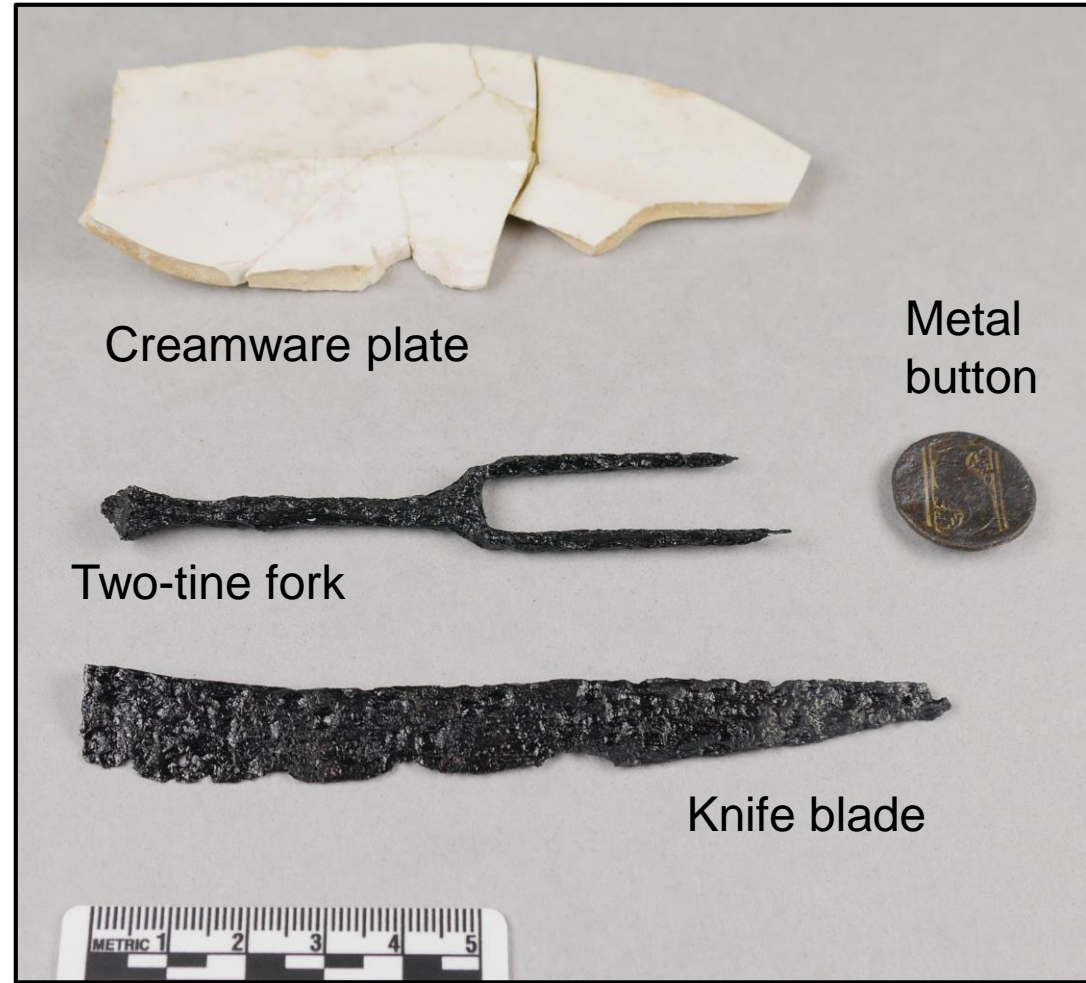


# Building the Archaeology Collections: Donations

## *Cultural Resource*

### *Management Investigations:*

- CRSP 1993 excavation of Betsey Prince site, Brookhaven, Long Island
- Homestead of Betsey & Prince Jessup, ca. 1800-1830
- Rare example in NY of free African American household site from 19<sup>th</sup> C.



# Building the Archaeology Collections: Donations

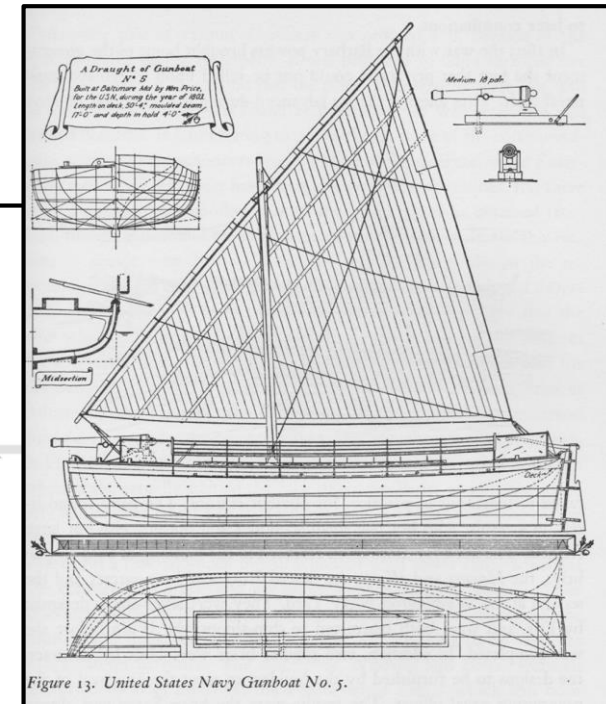
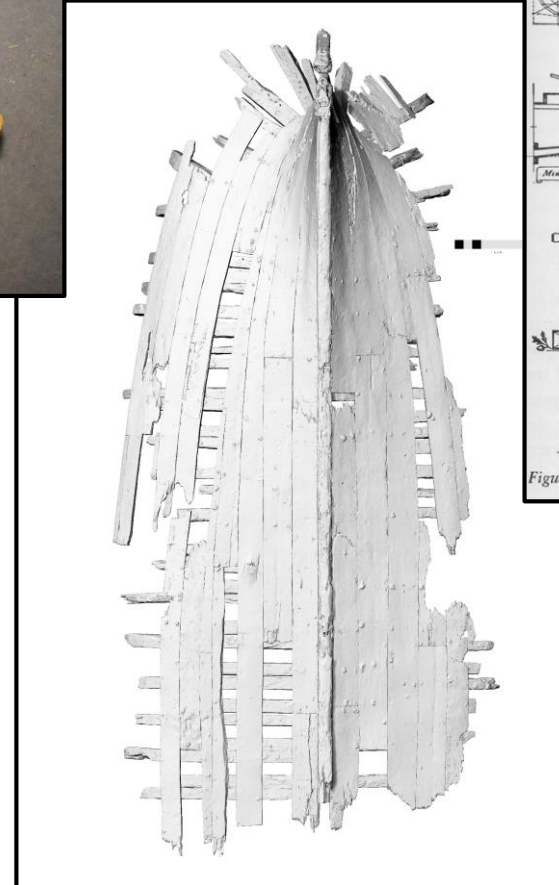
## Cultural Resource

### Management Investigations:

- 2010 data recovery at WTC
- American gun boat for coastal defense during Revolutionary war
- NYSM exhibit installation, 2025



Musket balls recovered



Probable gun boat design

Hull reconstruction



# Building the Archaeology Collections: Donations

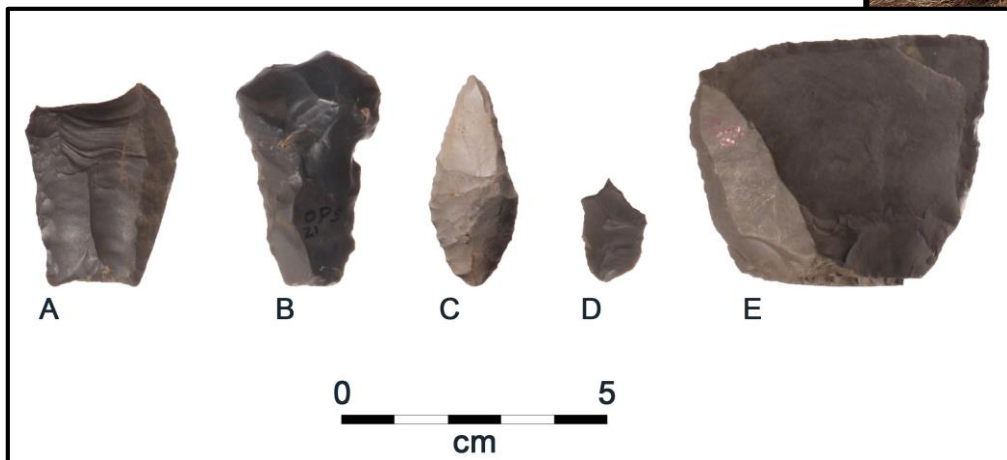
## *NYSM Field Research*

- OPS Paleoindian site, Madison County (ca. 12,000-11,600 years before present)
- Excavations since 2015
- Artifacts recovered to date donated 2019



OPS site, 2018 excavations

Donors:  
Tom & Joyce Bush, Mike Beardsley & Mark Clymer



OPS site Paleoindian stone tools





# Building the Archaeology Collections: “Knowledge Building”

## *NYSM Research on Collections*

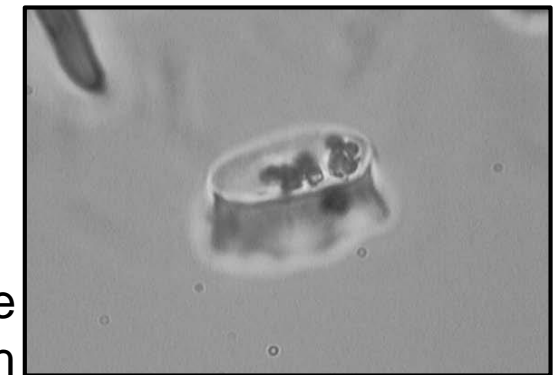
- Research on collections expands our knowledge base and *increases* their research value
- Example: Hart’s research on crop domestication using residues on pottery sherds & residue dating
- Revealed Native Americans in NY began cultivating corn ~300 BC, 1300 years earlier than previously believed
- Highlights importance of curating archaeological collections, permitting new studies & reinterpretation as analytical techniques evolve



Pottery sherd, Vinette site, Oswego Co. (Maize phytoliths in residue dated 2270+/-35 yrs. before present)



Pottery sherd, Wickham site, Oswego Co.



Maize phytolith



***THANK YOU !***

