**Background Information**

**Penn Museum’s North America Collection: An Overview**

Although the Penn Museum was founded in 1887 to focus on the study of the civilizations of the ancient Near East, the Museum was quick to incorporate the collecting of Native American culture under the influence of Daniel Garrison Brinton, the first professor of anthropology in the United States. This effort began with modestly scaled archaeological excavations in nearby Pennsylvania and New Jersey by Charles C. Abbott and Henry C. Mercer in the 1880s and 1890s, and at Key Marco, Florida by Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1897. Over twenty ethnographic collecting expeditions between 1900 and 1926 soon followed.

Today, the collections of the American Section are the largest of the Museum with approximately 300,000 archaeological and ethnographic specimens. The collections span the continents of North and South America from Alaska to Argentina, and document human habitation and history from the ancient past to the present day. Within that collection, the North American collections include about 120,000 archaeological specimens and 40,000 ethnographic objects from Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean.

The North American archaeological collections contain specimens from 45 of the 48 United States. Regions of particular strength include Alaska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Texas. Highlights include collections from Alaska's northern-most locales of Point Barrow and Point Hope excavated from 1917-1919 by William Van Valin, and by Arthur Hopson at Barrow in 1929. In Alaska, Dr. Frederica de Laguna dug at Cook Inlet's Kechemak Bay from 1930-1932, in the Lower Yukon Valley in 1935, at Prince William Sound from 1933-1937 (jointly there with the Danish National Museum in 1933). De Laguna also conducted excavations in Southeastern Alaska's Tlingit region from 1949-1953. Archaeological excavations were conducted in Western Alaska's Norton Sound by Louis Giddings from 1948-1952, at Unalakleet by Bruce Lutz in 1968 and 1969, and at Cape Nome by John Bockstoce in 1971-1973.

The Museum conducted research in search of early humans in the 1930s and 1940s. Collection holdings include those recovered in the 1930s by Edgar B. Howard and John L. Cotter at eastern New Mexico's Burnet Cave, Clovis, and Anderson Lake regions where excavations were sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania in collaboration with the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia from 1932-1937. The collections from Blackwater Draw are recognized as the Clovis Type-site. Penn's search for early humans continued in Wyoming in 1940 and 1941 when Edgar B. Howard, Charles Bache, and Linton Satterthwaite excavated at the Eden Valley Finley Site.

The American Section houses the Hazzard-Hearst collection of Ancestral Pueblo archaeological materials from southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah, specifically Mesa Verde and Grand Gulch, respectfully. Ceramics and organic holdings from Mesa Verde were acquired by the Wetherill Brothers between 1889 and 1892 and from the Mancos Canyon region of Utah in this period as well. Much of this collection was exhibited at the 1893 Chicago Worlds Columbian Exposition before it came to Philadelphia.

Rare pre-contact Calusa Indian holdings from Florida were excavated by Frank Johnson in 1891 at Punta Rassa, also known as Mound Key, and by Frank Hamilton Cushing at Key Marco and Tarpon Springs in 1895 and 1896. To the north in New Jersey, Earnest William Hawkes and Ralph Linton excavated at Morrestown and Tickerton in 1915 and 1916. Davidson, Mason and Satterthwaite excavated at Lock Haven, Pennsylvania in 1929.

The North American ethnographic holdings number approximately 40,000 objects attributed to approximately 200 tribes and organized within eleven geographic regions (Artic, Sub-Arctic, Northwest Coast, Plateau, California, Great Basin, Southwest, Great Plains, Southeast and Northeast). The strongest collections are those systematically created via thirty study and collecting expeditions in Alaska, the Northwest Coast, Southwest, Southeast, and Sub-arctic regions. Thousands of individual donations significantly contribute to the collections in many areas.

Unlike at most art museums, this museum’s collection includes a vast array of objects of everyday life, the belongings of elders, men, women, and children. Objects housed here include fishing and hunting equipment, weapons, tools, and feast dishes; saddles, snowshoes, knives and pipes, musical instruments and hairbrushes; tweezers, ornaments, lip plugs, and medicines; toys and games, house models, dolls, and baby carriers; items used in ritual and ceremony, raw materials, even totem poles and canoes.

For scholars and the interested public, an online collections database, launched in 2012, continues to grow as scholars, museum volunteers and others input information and photographs about the materials both on and off display. To date, the database has about 335,000 object records representing more than 690,000 objects, more than 100,000 of them with accompanying photographs. Visitors can explore many of the art and artifacts from the American section—and from expeditions around the globe, online: <http://www.penn.museum/collections/index.php>.