



Proposal to the

ASOR *ad hoc* Archives Committee

from

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The American Heritage Center (AHC) at the University of Wyoming proposes that the ASOR archives should be transferred to it for preservation and public access in perpetuity. The Center will undertake to process, preserve and make accessible all physical records in accordance with its normal procedures, to take on the digital copies of these records already made and to make them publicly accessible, and to work with ASOR to digitize other records, as selected, and to generally work with ASOR to enhance the collection(s) and their use. This will fulfill the charge given by ASOR's President Sharon Herbert to the ASOR *ad hoc* Archives Committee. For an introduction to the American Heritage Center, please see Appendix One.

Charge

ASOR possesses an archive of about 200 cubic feet consisting of written records and diaries, photographs, and publications spanning its 120 year history. These are presently housed at the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (HMANE), formerly known as the Harvard Semitic Museum. The museum has informed ASOR that they can no longer host this material and requests that it be removed. ASOR is thus looking for a permanent home for its archives. As ASOR President Sharon Herbert charged the ASOR Ad Hoc Archives Committee,

ASOR must determine how best to curate them. The decision involves four interlocking issues for the ad hoc committee to consider: location; organization, maintenance, and accessibility. The first decision, on which the rest hinge, is location.

This is correct. The location will determine the ease and costs for accomplishing the three main tasks for ASOR's archival collections. The charge document from President Herbert (10/2021) discusses the possibility of locating the materials at the Strange Center. This has the advantage of

returning the collections to ASOR's control after the collections were poorly looked after by Boston University and Harvard. Neither institution took long-term responsibility for the materials which ASOR thought it had given into their care. Placing the archives in the Strange Center, however, has few other advantages. The Center lacks archival quality storage facilities and fire suppression. It employs no professional archivist on its staff to organize and provide accessibility to the materials and to process new collections. It does not have readily accessible server storage and web collections nor the programming staff to maintain them (Ackerman evaluation, 10/2021, p. 10). In sum, if ASOR moves the archival collections to Alexandria, then it will shoulder all the costs associated with managing and making accessible the collections. It will also need to acquire the (human) resources to accomplish this.

The American Heritage Center proposes an alternative solution in which it will absorb many of the costs into its ongoing processing operations, as we do with all our collections, and professional archivists will perform or supervise all management of the materials. The following proposal lays out how donating the ASOR collections to the AHC (1) can solve most of the present problems with ASOR's archives by making it part of the AHC's standard activities and (2) which goals the AHC would need ASOR's continued involvement and financial support to accomplish.

Proposed Solution

The American Heritage Center (AHC) at the University of Wyoming is a large archival institution—one of the nation's ten largest non-governmental archives—with the resources to maintain and make accessible ASOR's archival collections.¹ For the physical collections, this could be done without cost to ASOR as part of the Center's ongoing activities. As a public institution, the AHC makes more than 98% of its 4000 collections directly accessible to the public. Once processed, the ASOR collections would simply become available through the AHC's Reference Services department in the same manner we make accessible our other collections to our patrons, whoever they may be. The finding aids would be published in a searchable manner to enable the materials to be found.

The digitized parts of the collections could be made accessible in different ways, depending on what has been done already. Many of the digital images can be placed on the AHC's Digital Collections server and made immediately accessible through links in the relevant finding aid and the ASOR website. Some of this can also be done without cost.

Future digitization of collection materials is also possible, using the AHC's excellent Digitization Lab and Digital Photography Lab. Determining exactly what items should be digitized and how to make them accessible would be a matter for discussion and planning between ASOR and the AHC and would probably require funding of some sort.

Should ASOR decide to donate its collections to the American Heritage Center, the Center would like to work with ASOR to make the AHC more of a collecting center for American archaeological excavations in the Middle East. Specifically, we would like to become a place where archaeologists and archaeological organizations can deposit their field notes and other records for future investigation. The Albright Institute of Archaeological Research is already making plans to transfer its records to the AHC and we would like to become a place to preserve other records that may become important to future research.

¹ For more information about the AHC, see Appendix 1, or visit the Center's website at: www.uwyo.edu/AHC.

The Proposal in Detail

This proposal from the American Heritage Center sees the preservation of the physical archives as a straightforward manner, performed in accordance with the best practices concerning the collecting, processing and the making accessible of written, photographic and other archival materials. The digitized materials will require some planning and discussion between ASOR and the AHC to determine how best to use them. New digitization will also require decision making and project planning. (See further discussion below.)

Physical Materials

Step 1) Transport the collection material to the American Heritage Center

There are approximately 200 cubic feet of collections that would need shipping to the American Heritage Center. Most of the paper material will be fairly easy to ship and need no special treatment. However, the collections include 73 boxes of glass plate photographs (8" x 5" x 5.5"). Special care will need to be taken to not damage these.

Estimates of shipping costs will vary, depending on whether the decision is taken to use a professional mover or alternative means can be devised. Shipping details will need to be worked out between ASOR and the AHC.

Step 2) At the AHC: From Accessioning to Processing

Once at the AHC, the boxes will be accessioned. The Acquisitions staff will match the manifest with the boxes themselves to determine what has arrived. This is followed by processing.

Standard processing at the AHC involves a multi-level approach. The first step is Content Listing, where the materials are quickly examined, organized, listed and placed into archival quality boxes and folders. A determination is made about further steps needed for the collection's care and accessibility. For instance, will it need more complete processing or do selected items need special attention for preservation? Content listing produces an initial finding aid as well. Once this process has been completed, the finding aid is published at Archives West (<https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org>), the collection can be stored in the archives, and become available for research.

The ASOR collections have already been arranged and described by a professional archivist, with finding aids prepared. Many of the initial processing steps have been accomplished.² If the AHC's content listing process can match the boxes with the finding aids' organization, then the content-listing step will take place quickly. The finding aids will need only technical adjustments to fit into the Archives West repository (as well as WorldCat, an international catalogue maintained by the Library of Congress), where we maintain all the AHC's finding aids, and the collections will become accessible. No further processing of the physical materials would be needed.

² I have examined the finding aids and discussed the digitized materials with Marta Ostovich, who looks after them in the Strange Center. The professional archivist who did this work did an excellent job and I anticipate their work will make straightforward the transfer of the collections to an archive such as the AHC.

New collections, such as those from future ASOR presidents, can also be absorbed into the ASOR collections maintained at the AHC, processed and made available to the public. The AHC regularly takes in new accretions belonging with previously donated collections. We process these as a matter of course, update the relevant finding aid (or create a new one if needed), and make the new material available along with the old.

Step 3) Accessibility of physical collections

Once the finding aid(s) is/are published, patrons can access the collections. This can happen in three ways.

- 1) Patrons come to the AHC's reading room and request to look at materials. There is no restriction on this except for those placed by the collection donor, i.e., ASOR.
- 2) If the patron cannot travel to the AHC, but knows what they want to see, they can request digital copies. The AHC will perform the digitization (or use existing digitized material) and send it to the patron. There is a standard set of fees for this service, which is provided at cost.
- 3) RRAD, Remote Research and Discovery: If a remote researcher does not know what parts of a collection they wish to examine, they can use RRAD. This service pairs a researcher with a research assistant at the AHC. Communicating through a Zoom link which includes a document camera, the assistant provides the researcher the ability to read through documents, folders and collections in order to select the material useful to them. This can then be digitized or made available in other forms.

Digitized Materials and the Future Digitizing of Collection Material

The American Heritage Center has a large Digitization Lab—with two Zeuschel imagers for document digitization and four workstations for audio, video and film digitization—and a Digital Photography Lab with high-end equipment—including a 50 megapixel camera and a 100 megapixel camera. This equipment enables the AHC to perform digital duplication and preservation at the cutting-edge of technology. Furthermore, the AHC uses Luna to provide an online Digital Collections platform that at present contains more than 150,000 digital objects (<https://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu/luna/servlet>).

Despite this capacity, the American Heritage Center practices strategic digitization and encourages its collection donors to do the same, especially those with whom we have an ongoing relationship. The aim of the strategic digitization process is to determine the purpose of digitization before one undertakes a large digitization project costing significant time and money. The goal is determine the ultimate use of the digitized materials and to design the digitization project accordingly. For example, the AHC is presently conversing with three different groups about digitizing collection material in which they have an interest; these include the family of a senator and the family of a governor. The conversation focuses on both strategically identifying what collection elements would benefit from digitization and how to financially support a significant addition to the AHC's current digitization projects.

Given this, ASOR and the AHC should have a conversation about what digitization is desirable and can be accomplished for these collections. The conversation should determine what ASOR's goals are for digital access, rather than simply attempt to duplicate what was previously done. ASOR has already digitized many items in the collections, and in the past, made them available online. They are not presently available and have not been for several years, nor is a copy of the code that supported the online site. The AHC certainly could duplicate what was available five years ago, given the different tools and abilities at the AHC. However, the world

has changed since that approach was imagined and put into place. This would be a good moment to reconsider how to use its digitized materials in this post(?) -Covid world with all the new tools and abilities available. The AHC would suggest that ASOR reassess the goals of digitization and plan accordingly.

To be blunt, digitization costs. The digitization of materials costs, storing them costs, creating metadata costs, placing them on the web costs, making them findable costs. Here is where the AHC will need support from ASOR to achieve ASOR's goals.

Digitized objects are usually handled two standard ways. First, they can be treated like items in a physical collection and simply stored away. Their existence can be noted in a finding aid and readily shared with a patron when requested. Second, they can be placed into an online digital repository. For example, they could be placed in a general repository that takes a wide variety of materials from a number of collections, such as the AHC's Digital Collections repository on Luna (<https://digitalcollections.uwyo.edu/luna/servlet>). Of course, other creative solutions could be implemented.

Future Digitization of Collection Materials can be done through a planned approach or it can be left to be simply random. Taking the latter option first, as a standard practice, the AHC digitizes materials from any collection at the request of its patrons (for an at-cost fee). Once digitized, the AHC saves these so that should a second patron request the materials, the digital version can be provided. This random process requires no intentional monitoring or direction, but neither does it produce a designed outcome. A thoughtful plan, by contrast, will produce an intended set of outcomes, such as the complete digitization of collection or selected materials from it, according to the planners' goals. For example, if it is important that a site's excavation notes and data be digitally available online, and perhaps searchable, then this can be accomplished through a planned project. Such a plan will come with a cost.

What should an ASOR digitization approach look like? The current approach, implemented in 2017, stems from internet technology and approaches that are 10-15 years old. Since then, many new tools have been developed and new ways of using the internet to make materials accessible have been created. Before ASOR decides to put a lot of effort into recreating this approach, I would recommend that it and the AHC do some creative thinking about how to make the ASOR collections more widely known and more broadly accessible.

The Deed of Gift

Donating collection material to the American Heritage Center—indeed to most archival institutions—is a legal process, governed by binding contracts. The AHC accomplishes this with a document called a Deed of Gift (DoG). The DoG transfers ownership of the collection to the AHC. As an archive, the AHC does not take loans of materials from donors, as museums do. As scary as this sounds, the DoG contains a number of clauses that provide a donor, ASOR in this case, with a choices to make about the AHC's treatment of the collection(s) and the ability to make clear to the Center its intentions for the care and treatment of its materials. The sections for input include matters of copyright, de-accessioning (if it should ever happen), restrictions, etc. The DoG can also be modified with custom clauses to be agreed upon between the two institutions. The goal of the deed is to have a clear understanding between the two organizations about how the collection should be treated. In the case of ASOR and the AHC, the Center would

hope that the document would lay the foundation for an ongoing, cooperative relationship that enables ASOR to achieve its archival goals over the coming years and decades.

The reason for the transfer of ownership over the collection is to free the AHC to use its best professional judgement and skills to preserve and make accessible the collection in a timely fashion. For example, should collection material be damaged and require immediate treatment—perhaps a nineteenth-century, handwritten journal has water dumped on it—ownership enables the AHC to proceed without hesitation to take steps to mitigate the damage, before it is irretrievable. The goal is not to “take your stuff”; instead the DoG enables the AHC to best carry out the intentions of the collection’s donor. And since ASOR itself is an ongoing living institution, ASOR itself would be consulted on a regular basis. Perhaps a standing committee, such as ASOR’s Committee on Archaeological Research and Policy, could take on the responsibility to liaise with the AHC on a regular basis.

Continued Collecting: Within ASOR and Beyond

Collections are growing things. New materials arrive for long-standing collections all the time. They are usually accessioned in accordance with an existing Deed of Gift and so require no new paperwork. Thus we would be more than willing to receive the papers of future (and past) presidents as they become available, as well as other papers and collections ASOR chooses to donate. If ASOR would like, the AHC could work with them to approach the appropriate individuals to acquire their papers.

If ASOR chooses to donate its materials to the AHC, the Center hopes that it would allow us—indeed work with us—to encourage the donations of other American archaeological records from archaeologists who work in the areas of ASOR’s purview. This would make the ASOR materials not just a one-off solution to a present problem, but the center of a growing collecting focus for the AHC while serving the field as a whole.

Uniting Divided Collections

It is often a good idea to unite collections whose materials are divided across institutions, and in general the AHC promotes this approach. We have over recent decades de-accessioned collection material and donated it to other archives with significant collections in an area. This is done on a case-by-case basis.

With regard to the specific question of the Nelson Glueck materials, including Tell el Kheleifeh, and the Shechem Records of Collection 017, my first thought (speaking for myself only on this point) is that it sounds like a good idea. This assumes that HMANE will accession the materials, take responsibility for them and make them available to patrons. Perhaps the same applies to Clarence Fisher’s 1930 excavation diary from Antioch whose materials are at Princeton. If this were done after the AHC accessioned the materials, then there would be paper trail to indicate their location once institutional memory expires.

Alternatively, ASOR could retain the original material and provide these institutions with (digital?) copies. That way the originals are always available whatever happens at HMANE or Princeton.

Appendix One: The American Heritage Center and Its Collections

The American Heritage Center is one of the ten largest non-governmental archives in the United States (<https://www.uwyo.edu/AHC>). It began more than 100 years ago when Grace Raymond Hebard—UW faculty member, librarian, and historian—began collecting the papers and reminiscences of Wyoming’s pioneers. In 1945, her research collection on the history of Wyoming, the West, emigrant trails, and Native Americans provided the nucleus of the AHC’s collections. Today, the AHC contains more than 95,000 cubic feet of historically important documents, photographs, maps, and artifacts—as well as film, magnetic tape and born-digital materials. Its collections cover the nation, the region, the state, and UW. Its collecting strengths include international mining and petroleum, conservation and the environment, national politics, journalism, the American entertainment industry (esp. Hollywood), Western culture and tourism, and the history of Wyoming and UW. Further information can be found in its collection guides (<http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/collections/by-subject/index.html>). American archaeological excavation and exploration would constitute a new collecting focus for the AHC.

The AHC is a public research institution and its reading room is open to UW students, staff, and faculty as well as K–12 and community college students and instructors, national and international scholars, and community members. AHC professionals provide research instruction to more than 100 classes annually and work with instructors to develop student projects using AHC materials. Additionally, a typical year sees 5,000 U.S. and international researchers exploring the Center’s holdings.

In 2010, the Center received the Society of American Archivists’ Distinguished Service Award for its pioneering development of minimal processing (“MPLP”) to provide collection accessibility and for its service to its constituencies by providing an active K–12 and undergraduate outreach program, administering Wyoming History Day, and providing consistently excellent reference service.