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Historical Archaeology in the Next Millennium: A View from CRM

In the article "Historical Archaeology in the Next Millennium: A Forum," Donald L. Hardesty outlines his views on the future of historical archaeological research and professional development. Upon reading the article, I discovered much that I could agree with, several topics that I had not previously thought about, and a few points on which my opinions differ significantly. Also, I have my own observations about the future of historical archaeology that were not discussed in Hardesty's article. Most importantly, I was somewhat disappointed that he did not expand his article to include his views concerning the role of public policy in shaping the future of historical archaeology. I agree that cultural resource management (CRM) will continue to play a pivotal role in the evolution of our discipline, especially in the United States, but also in other parts of the world, and because CRM is, by its nature, a product of public policy, I cannot divorce the role of policy from my own observations about professionalism and research in the archaeological community. I will try to limit my remarks, however, to the opinions professed in Hardesty's article, and will only invoke comments about the role of policy in the future development of the profession when necessary.

I agree with Hardesty in his assessment that environmental studies in historical archaeology could and should be one of the foremost research topics of the new millennium. Prehistoric archaeologists have most often looked at the limits placed on culture change by the environment, as well as ways that culture has adapted to environmental limits and/or changes. Historical archaeologists, on the other hand, have a potentially rich source of research topics in the ways by which the environment has been affected by

modern technology and culture. Hardesty has listed a few of these events (fires, floods, deforestation, etc.) and processes (climatic cycles) by which environmental change has been spurred by human intervention. I would add to this list the study of environmental change resulting from terraforming, consumerism, and, more basically, the environmental changes that have been associated with a rapidly increasing population during the modern period.

As Hardesty so aptly points out, landscapes are a prime source of data about modern human interactions with the environment. Unfortunately, a potential problem affecting an increase in landscape studies within the historical archaeology of the next millennium lies in the way archaeology is now conducted. Especially in the United States and Canada, but increasingly in other areas of the world, field investigations of archaeological sites are conducted primarily within the confines of CRM, or its equivalents. By its nature, the CRM currently being conducted in the United States as a response to the demands of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) is inherently particularistic. Only that portion of the landscape affected by a proposed undertaking is generally available for study. Within that "area of potential effect," archaeological sites are identified, evaluated, and, if determined to be significant, more thoroughly investigated on the bases of their own merits than in their relationships with the larger whole, i.e., the landscape. Only in certain circumstances, when a project covers a large area, is it possible to use the relationships between the environment and the humans occupying it as a basis for a research agenda.

In the 1994 "Save the Past for the Future II" Conference, held in Breckenridge, Colorado, a significant topic of discussion within the Integrated Resource Management Workshop was the policy of "ecosystem management" within United States federal land-holding agencies (Nickels 1995:41-46). Traditionally, this approach has ignored the relationship between humans and the environment, or at most, has viewed humans as

intrusive on the landscape (Nickels 1995:42). However, the participants of the workshop agreed that ecosystem management was a relevant tool for integrating culture studies with a means for managing landscapes beyond the boundaries of public lands. As Nickels (1995:42) states, “. . . one of the hallmarks of this approach is to de-emphasize artificial administrative boundaries that have little meaning in the understanding of ecological processes.” The purpose of the workshop was to develop specific ways in which archaeology could be incorporated into management of the landscape, both to protect existing resources and to promote a better understanding of human interaction with the environment. One conclusion of the participants was the need to stress compliance with Section 110 of the NHPA, that provides for a broad inventory and assessment of the cultural resource base on all federally-owned lands. While Section 110 is only applicable for public lands, additionally, the National Environmental Protection Act is now being used more as a basis for cultural landscape studies without the limitations of Section 106 of the NHPA.

Although the previous comments have been directed to one of Hardesty's proposed research topics for the new millennium in historical archaeology, this response to Hardesty's article is perforce directed more to his comments about future trends in the professional community than to potential avenues for research. In my capacity as a co-owner and business manager of a cultural resources management (CRM) consulting firm in the United States, I have, in recent years, been less involved in the scholarly aspects of archaeology. Rather, my energies have been focused on financial and personnel management of the company, compliance issues, advances in technology and methodologies, and in helping to shape the future of historical archaeology and CRM in the United States through involvement in a variety of education committees and fora. In these capacities, I have witnessed countless examples of “professionalism,” as defined by Hardesty.

Unfortunately however, I, too, have observed “non-professionalism” in a variety of settings. Unlike Hardesty, I cannot attribute all non-professional behavior to a recent lack of sufficient mentoring within the academic community. The current trend towards the hiring of large numbers of persons with undergraduate degrees to perform fieldwork in CRM does not explain why significant sites are destroyed through construction when a client tires of waiting for a long overdue project review from an agency archaeologist with many years of experience. Nor does it explain the continued excavation of non-endangered sites, most often within an academic context, while thousands of significant sites, which are more often historic than prehistoric, are falling prey to uncontrolled development. On the other hand, lack of mentoring does relate to the fact that certain academic archaeologists continue to discount CRM as being either a valid approach to the study of archaeological resources or a worthwhile employment goal. This relationship, however, places the lack of mentoring more as an “effect” of nonprofessional behavior than as a “cause.”

I agree with Hardesty that cultural resource management will continue to provide the majority of archaeological hiring opportunities in the United States into the next millennium. However, I disagree that the situation in recent years of having a large, mobile, somewhat unenculturated “underclass” of archaeological technicians and middle managers will necessarily continue into the future as well. There are indications already that professional opportunities will be greatest for persons with advanced degrees and a strong grounding in the practice of CRM. This grounding will be obtained through the efforts of everyone in the profession. Just as it is and will continue to be the responsibility of CRM companies and agencies to provide mentoring opportunities through internships, training programs, and financial support for education, it is and will continue to be the responsibility of the academy to update its programs to support

the reality of current professional opportunities in archaeology.

On the other hand, it is likely that job openings will decrease for persons without a graduate degree. We may already have seen the heyday of labor-intensive archaeological investigations within the context of CRM. In a paper presented at the 1998 Society for American Archaeology meetings in Seattle, Washington, W. Kevin Pape discussed the various ways that CRM consultants are now utilizing technological approaches in the collection of archaeological data. He observed that "in a future characterized by shrinking program budgets and demand for more cost-effective compliance surveys, technology (i.e., remote sensing and GIS) will begin to take the place of conventional survey methods" (Pape 1998). This will result in a need for fewer people to conduct large-scale surveys. Instead, field crews will consist of fewer, but better trained archaeologists whose function will be to "ground truth" data derived by technological methods.

Additionally, alternative methods of mitigating adverse effects of construction projects on significant sites, other than full-scale excavation, are becoming more commonly employed by CRM practitioners. Several recent mitigation projects conducted by Gray & Pape, Inc., have included little, if any, fieldwork. Rather, clients, review agencies, and the consultant teamed to develop mitigation plans based on the analysis and synthesis of existing data in museums, private collections, and curatorial facilities, combined with monitoring of construction activities. As a profession, archaeology has a long history of being more interested in data collection than in data synthesis (witness the extensive but largely unreported collections that exist in most major museums). Perhaps this is why Hardesty stated that the underclass of archaeological technicians provides most of the current day-to-day archaeological research. I would argue, however, that archaeological fieldwork does not equate to archaeological research.

In the several years that I have been participating in panel discussions about the "rift" between the academy and CRM, I have come to the conclusion that the rift is not so much between these two groups as it is between responsible professionals and irresponsible archaeologists, no matter how the latter support themselves or their level of education. Fortunately, I believe that the former far outnumber the latter.

I agree wholeheartedly with Hardesty that a commitment to the archaeological community and to our rapidly disappearing data base is necessary for all persons engaged in archaeological data collection, research, synthesis, education, and management. It is difficult to imagine that there are persons in academia who continue to degrade CRM and ignore site preservation, but they exist. How can those persons be trusted with the mentoring of students, when they fail to understand the relationships between academia and CRM or the goals of the preservation community? It is also difficult to imagine that there are persons in CRM who are still unwilling to adequately train and support their staffs to be responsible professionals, yet they, too, exist.

I agree with Hardesty that instruction in professionalism and ethics should begin at the undergraduate level and continue throughout the entire archaeological education process. I disagree with Hardesty that agency and consulting archaeologists are the only ones having a need for continuing education. I believe that continuing education, practical as well as theoretical, should be part of each archaeologist's professional career.

Finally, I would suggest that we view ourselves not as a "herd of cats," but rather as a "pride of lions." Within the pride there is cooperation, support, and mutual respect. What better basis can our profession have for entering the new millennium?

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