Daniel G. Roberts Award for Excellence in Public Historical Archaeology

The Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory

Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory staff, December 2015: *Front row, left to right*: Nichole Doub, Rebecca Morehouse, Francis Lukezic, Alex Glass, and Annette Cook; and *back row, left to right*: Caitlin Shaffer, Sara Rivers Cofield, Erin Wingfield, Patricia Samford, Sharon Raftery, Gareth McNair-Lewis, and Ed Chaney.

The 2016 Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) Daniel G. Roberts Award for Excellence in Public Historical Archaeology was presented to the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory (MAC Lab) at the 49th Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology in Washington, D.C. Housed within the Maryland Historical Trust (the Maryland State Historic Preservation Office), the MAC Lab is the state's first-class archaeological research, conservation, and collections-management facility. As part of its mission, the MAC Lab serves a critically important public function: making that research and those collections accessible to a broad and diverse public audience. One of the first facilities in the United States built specifically to research, conserve, and curate archaeological materials, the MAC Lab and its programs—including hands-on public archaeology, traveling exhibits, and extraordinary online programs—reach thousands of individuals every year. This audience covers all walks of life (not just professional archaeologists) and hails from more than 163 countries.

The MAC Lab began as the vision of recently retired Maryland State Historic Preservation Officer J. Rodney Little, who recognized the curation crisis his state was facing and began a long and structured effort that culminated in the MAC Lab's opening in 1998. This effort included not only researching and designing what, at the time, would be considered a state-of-the-art facility, but building political support for the project with the governor of Maryland

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and the Maryland General Assembly. The goal at the time was to professionalize the care and management of Maryland's archaeological heritage.

More than 17 years later, that goal has been met and surpassed. The state's collections have been centralized in a single facility with museum-standard environmental controls and security systems. Collections once housed in grocery-store boxes or deteriorating paper bags have been upgraded and rehoused in archival-standard housing. Some eight million artifacts from more than 5,500 archaeological sites have been carefully inventoried, organized, and are now tracked by a system ensuring that these materials will always be accounted for. Of the millions of artifacts housed in the MAC Lab, thousands have been professionally conserved, ensuring their long-term preservation. The MAC Lab's conservation program—one of the few in the nation equipped for underwater projects—has also been an important consultant/conservator on many projects, including the USS *Constellation*, the CSS *Alabama*, Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*, the CSS *Hunley*, the USS *Monitor*, and the HMS *DeBraak*.

Many, if not most, of the MAC Lab collections come from cultural resource management (CRM) projects, and it is the MAC Lab's concerted efforts to make these collections accessible that go to the heart of the Roberts Award. Dan Roberts built his career in CRM and, along with his colleagues at John Milner Associates, modeled many of the practices in the field of public archaeology that are now considered standard. The MAC Lab has studied these practices and adapted them to archaeological collections with outstanding success.

Since its opening in 1998, the MAC Lab has responded to 900 requests for collections access—an average of more than 50 a year—hosting researchers, students, and the interested public able to travel to the facility to study the lab's extensive holdings. But the MAC Lab wanted to do more to enhance access, especially to nonspecialist audiences. Perhaps the facility's greatest contribution, then, is its use of online technologies for sharing archaeological research and collections with the public. The MAC Lab is bringing archaeological materials and findings to electronic screens everywhere, becoming a pioneer in making its collections accessible in many forms via the World Wide Web.

For example, the MAC Lab's online artifact type collection, "Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland": <http://www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/index.htm>, has become an indispensable resource to interested parties everywhere, registering an impressive one million views from 163 countries since 2009 (the year page visits were first counted). This digital type collection allows visitors to identify projectile points, prehistoric and historical ceramics, and several categories of "small finds," including horse furniture, sleeve buttons, marbles, religious artifacts, and smoker's companions; more artifact categories are slated to be added in the coming years. The "Diagnostic Artifacts" website is well-known to state, national, and international audiences, and shows the power of the Internet for sharing archaeological information.

The MAC Lab also provides online access to its collections, including digital copies of all field and lab records, photographs, reports, and an artifact catalog database: <http://www.jefpat.org/NEHWeb/>. The MAC Lab has created a searchable online database of archaeobotanical data from more than 125 Maryland sites, as well as a wood- and charcoal-identification guide for the most common tree species in the state: <http://www.jefpat.org/archeobotany/Home.aspx> and <http://www.jefpat.org/Wood&CharcoalIdentification/Introduction.htm>. The facility's staff is now developing a new online database, including sealed and dated feature contexts from some of Maryland's most important archaeological sites. The MAC Lab has also served as an important partner for other online initiatives, including "A Comparative Archaeological Study of Colonial Chesapeake Culture": <http://www.chesapeakearchaeology.org/index.cfm>, and St. Mary's College of Maryland's "Colonial Encounters: The Lower Potomac Valley at Contact, 1500–1720 AD": <http://colonialencounters.org/index.aspx>.

In addition to the online databases and type collections, the MAC Lab publishes a monthly online *Curator's Choice* report highlighting artifacts from the collections. These essays provide detailed and engaging information about particular objects and appeal to public and professional audiences. This website, now with 95 essays and counting, has had approximately 50,000

page views since 2009. Of these essays, 79 have been about historical period artifacts. The lab's *Maryland History by the Object* blog also uses artifacts to explore interesting aspects of Maryland history; this blog has had 28,000 page views from 83 countries since mid-2013.

While the digital delivery of information has become a primary venue for the MAC Lab to showcase its research and holdings, hands-on work remains an important component of the facility's public outreach. The MAC Lab sponsors an annual public archaeology program. The focus of the program has been an 18th-century plantation complex, with nearly 3,000 people participating in field- and lab work. MAC Lab staff also helped with organizing the Huntingtown High School Archaeology Club. In this program, students catalog an orphaned collection (usually mid-19th-century contexts from privies and wells), mending and crossmending ceramics and glass, doing minimum vessel counts for glass and ceramics, researching artifacts, doing statistical analysis and historical deed research, and writing a feature report. The MAC Lab also works with archaeologists from St. Mary's College of Maryland to process "orphaned" collections as part of classwork at the college.

The MAC Lab is deeply involved with the production of exhibits using artifacts from its collections. The facility regularly places temporary loans in the various branch libraries in southern Maryland. Some of these exhibits focus on local archaeological sites or finds (the King's Reach site [18CV83], an olive-jar fragment found on the shores of the Patuxent), while others are more topical (a Victorian Christmas exhibit focusing on toys found in archaeological contexts). Each year, the members of the Huntingtown High School Archaeology Club create an exhibit on their yearly project in their local library branch. Most recently, in 2015, the *Outlander* television-series exhibit, developed using MAC Lab collections, traveled to four public libraries, with visits to additional venues in 2016. This exhibit has garnered regional, national, and international public attention, capturing the interest of the show's director and costume designer. An extensive online exhibit will be mounted in 2016 in conjunction with the airing of the show's second season.

The MAC Lab's extensive use of CRM collections, its use of the latest digital technologies for information delivery, its hands-on and experiential approaches to teaching history and archaeology, and commitment to exhibit development make the MAC Lab especially deserving of the Roberts Award. The SHA congratulates the MAC Lab for its outstanding record of excellence in public historical archaeology.

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