

History of the Laboratory of Archaeology

By

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In 1938, the Laboratory was begun in conjunction with the first archaeology class taught at UGA, but it was not until October 15, 1947 that the Laboratory was formally established under the Department of Anthropology by archaeologist, Arthur R. Kelly. He was the only faculty member in the Department for about 16 years, and was dedicated to conducting archaeological excavations with students regularly throughout Georgia. He set up an archaeology laboratory immediately as part of the new archaeology program, and began to gather ever-larger collections of artifacts through student excavations. He worked on many small projects, but the majority of his early work consisted of excavations conducted prior to the construction of hydroelectric dams and reservoirs throughout the state. The laboratory was, and continues to be, an informal part of the Department's program, but the collections have grown tremendously through the years. In the early 1960s other archaeologists were added to the faculty so that by 1968 there were three archaeology faculty and many undergraduate students regularly conducting excavations, thus further increasing the size of the collection. Further, many members of the general public have donated their personal archaeological collections. Some of these donations were quite extensive in size and importance.

The laboratory and curation facilities have been moved many times from the inception of the Department of Anthropology. In order to make clear the complexity of the history of the collection, I have recently compiled the following outline. Since the founder of the Department, Arthur Kelly, died in 1979 and thus could not provide this data, it has been reconstructed from a very few University documents and much oral history. Kelly had his office, and perhaps a small archaeology laboratory in Room 203 of Leconte Hall on the University of Georgia campus from at least September of 1948 until about 1958. The original 1948 location of the laboratory was in the basement of Old College. It was set up by the late William Sears, who was working for Kelly at this time. The bulk of the collections were moved from there to the basement of nearby Candler Hall about 1955 when the space in Old College was needed for other purposes.

A second laboratory was opened in Phi Kappa Hall by the fall of 1958 or earlier, and Kelly spent much of his time there, perhaps including an office

for himself. In about 1963 the Department of Anthropology was expanded beyond a single person for the first time and moved its offices and classrooms to Peabody Hall. The laboratory at Phi Kappa Hall was closed at that time, and a new small laboratory was then opened in the basement of Peabody Hall. In 1967, an additional archaeology laboratory and storage area was opened in the Lucy Cobb Institute on Milledge Avenue off of the UGA campus. This was run by Harold Huscher and housed the West Point Reservoir collections. I worked in this lab from late 1968 until the spring of 1970. In about 1972 most of the remaining collections housed at the Candler Hall basement laboratory at that time (which still formed the bulk of the UGA collections) were also moved to the basement of the Lucy Cobb Institute for storage. Lucy Cobb, long a deteriorating wooden structure, had been condemned by then, and the collections were subject to very poor storage conditions. No offices were even permitted in the building by that time.

The entire Anthropology Department moved from Peabody Hall to the now-destroyed Dudley Hall, an ancient building on South Campus, beginning in the fall quarter of 1968, and a very small archaeology laboratory was set up there. In 1970 the Department moved to its present quarters in the rear of Baldwin Hall after it had been abandoned by the School of Education for a new building. Two large archaeology laboratories were established there - the Upstairs lab and the Downstairs lab. The few collections housed at Dudley Hall, and some of the material then still housed at Candler Hall were incorporated into the collections stored at Baldwin Hall. In about 1977 the University finally began renovations at Lucy Cobb, and the large collections poorly housed there were banished to the basement of the newly acquired Chicopee Facility, a 120 year old textile factory located east of the campus. The storage conditions there were abominable. A few of the collections from Lucy Cobb were also moved to the Baldwin Hall laboratory at the same time. Also in 1977, the Department of Anthropology began the Lake Oconee archaeology project, and reserved laboratory space in then relatively new Riverbend Laboratory Facility just off the southeastern edge of the campus. The huge collections from that project (ca. 2000 file boxes) were housed in the low-ceilinged sub-basement of that facility. Many a person has bashed their heads on the concrete ceiling and the thick bolts projecting from it in that "facility"! Additionally, a few of the collections from Baldwin Hall were transferred to this basement about 1978.

Beginning in 1990, our new, more modern, curation facility was constructed in the basement of the Riverbend building (plenty of head room here!), and during 1991 some of the collections from the old Chicopee facility were transferred there. The final transfer of all remaining material from the Chicopee facility to the new Riverbend facility was completed in the spring of 1993. In the winter and spring of 1994 the vast majority of the collections

from the Baldwin Hall facility were transferred to the Riverbend Facility, along with the Georgia Archaeological Site File. The remaining collections at Baldwin Hall were transferred in the 1994-1995 school year. The outer archaeological lab at Riverbend was also established during the 1994-95 school year. The compression shelving system was installed in the summer of 1995, and all the Lake Oconee material was moved from the Riverbend crawl space to the new shelving by September of that year. In this complex history, some collections of artifacts have been moved a half dozen times from place to place through the years.

In each move, some information was likely lost, either in terms of lost artifacts or provenience information. The worst move was from the collections housed in Candler Hall to the Chicopee Facility about 1977. This material was poorly handled by labor pool people, and many boxes were crushed and mangled. The original containers used for almost all the collections until about 1970 were abandoned cardboard shoe boxes (obtained from the now closed Marilyn's Shoe store at the southwestern corner of Clayton Street and College Avenue!). These were still the containers in use at the Chicopee facility, but were finally eliminated in the transfer of this material to the new Riverbend facility between 1991 and 1993. The material was then transferred to paper bags, and the shoe box labels torn off the boxes and saved. All of the artifacts in the new facility are presently stored in regular sized file boxes (15 by 12 by 10 inches) with lids. The lab and curation facility are now in better shape than ever, and meet Federal government standards. Beginning about 1998 a few collections were moved into the old Psychology Animal Laboratory (Monkey Barns) on College Station Road as part of the Georgia Museum of Natural History. Larger numbers of collections were moved into this poor facility after renovations at Riverbend starting in 2003.

During 2007 we acquired new curation space in the old Roberd's Furniture store building west of Athens as part of the Georgia Museum of Natural History. In this facility we built a metal mezzanine and have installed shelving capable of holding ca. 4000 more boxes. Most of the material housed in the old Monkey Barns on College Station Road was transferred to this new facility during the summer of 2007. The filling of the 2000 square foot area with shelving was completed by 2008. The Monkey Barns were destroyed in 2010. During the spring of 2008, the main rooms in the Riverbend facility were painted, carpeted, and new tables and chairs were installed. The lab became more spiffy than ever!

In 2016, UGA recognized that the Laboratory held significant collections, and the former Laboratory space was fast becoming inadequate to meet the needs of the growing collections and began to seek locations to move the Laboratory. As a result, a large warehouse at 1125 E.

Whitehall Rd. was identified to be the new location for the Laboratory. Our move to the new location was in the planning stages when a small fire occurred in an adjacent crawlspace in the former laboratory space in July of 2017. It was this fire that was the catalyst to get the Laboratory moved into the new location rapidly, as we could not remain in a space that had significant smoke damage.

What a long strange trip it's been. I only hope the next 60 years are kinder to the collections than were the first 60 years!