

**AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN 1974:
THE AIRLIE HOUSE SEMINARS IN RETROSPECT**

Michael J. Moratto

This essay responds to a kind invitation by Karen Mudar, on behalf of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and National Park Service (NPS), to offer my perspectives on the importance of the 1974 Airlie House seminars and subsequent report (McGimsey and Davis 1977). Toward this end, Dr. Mudar posed three questions. These questions, set forth below, frame my retrospective thoughts.

Question 1: How did you get involved in/recruited to the Airlie House project and what do you feel you contributed? First, to set the stage, let us remember that the early 1970s were a time of considerable ferment in the United States. A tsunami of Baby Boomers was pouring into universities nationwide; protests against the war in Vietnam were raging; and counter-cultural, environmental protection, sexual freedom, and civil rights movements were ubiquitous, especially among the young. In archaeology specifically, there was general alarm about the accelerating pace of site loss due to highway and dam construction, urban sprawl, and other land-development projects. Although new federal legislation—for example, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act (AHPA) of 1974—promised to help stem the adverse tide, this potential was not yet fully realized because the statutes were fresh out of the box, there was little in the way of case law to clarify the acts’ meaning, and most federal

agencies had not yet had the time, budget, or in some cases inclination to staff up sufficiently to ensure compliance. Moreover, state laws tended to be weak and unable to protect historical and archaeological resources or places of special value to communities.

The archaeological literature of the 1970s brims over with accounts of site destruction and novel ideas for mitigating the negative impacts of “progress” in the United States (see Chapman 1973; Lipe and Lindsay 1974; Moratto 1973a; Pastron et al. 1973). Perhaps the era’s most influential published work on this subject was Charles R. (“Bob”) McGimsey’s (1972) *Public Archaeology*. Although subsequent years would favor the term “cultural resource management” (CRM) over “public archaeology” or “conservation archaeology,” McGimsey himself and his University of Arkansas colleague Hester A. Davis were exceptionally active and productive, not only within the SAA but also in the broader realms of historic preservation. Indeed, McGimsey came up with the idea, and was the driving force in organizing, what became the Airlie House seminars.

It was through my involvement in some of McGimsey’s and Davis’s activities that the “Dynamic Duo” got to know me pretty well, leading them to request my participation in the Airlie House seminars. I had been immersed in archaeology and historic preservation since the early 1960s as a student and beginning in 1969, as a professor at San Francisco State University. My visibility was heightened as president (1972–1973) of the Society for California Archaeology (SCA), as a member of SAA’s Committee on the Public Understanding of Archaeology (1973–1975), and as the author of articles and booklets on the crises facing American archaeology (e.g., Moratto 1973a, 1973b, 1974). It was through these endeavors that I frequently interacted with McGimsey and Davis. As early as 1970, McGimsey, Eric Barnes, and I had contributed to the SCA publication *Death of the Past* (King 1970). McGimsey had also given presentations at SCA

meetings in which I participated. In addition, Davis and I had served together on national committees, and we often attended the same sessions at professional meetings. Hence, McGimsey and Davis were both well aware by 1974 that I was a kindred soul who shared their passion for heritage preservation. I also knew Rex Wilson, NPS Chief of Interagency Archaeological Services, who was consulted by SAA officers when selecting personnel for the planned seminars, though I do not know whether he ever discussed my qualifications with the SAA officers.

Each of the three Airlie House sessions featured two single-topic seminars. Of these six seminars, I was invited to take part in “archaeology and the law.” My fellow participants were Lawrence Aten, Vernon Bellecourt, Joe Brecher, Bob McGimsey, and Marvin Woolf. This seminar was held concurrently with the one devoted to “archaeology and Native Americans” during the first week of November 1974. The discussants in that session were Vernon Bellecourt (who divided his time between the two seminars), Hester Davis, Cynthia Irwin-Williams, Elden Johnson, Clydia Nahwoosky, Emory Sakequaptewa, and Marion White. After meeting hours and during meals we all were encouraged to interact informally, get better acquainted, and share information and insights. Among my reminiscences of the seminar participants are the visionary leadership of McGimsey and Davis, Woolf’s legal wisdom, Bellecourt’s clarity of focus, Irwin-Williams’s mental acuity (fast synapses!), Aten’s perceptive insights into the government’s bureaucratic operations, and White’s remarkable grace as she soldiered on despite her terminal illness.

The law seminar considered a broad array of subjects, including recent federal statutes and regulations, most notably the NHPA and newly enacted AHPA; the legal context for archaeological interaction with Native Americans, land owners, and other stakeholders; legal

aspects of professional certification; the role of archaeologists as advocates for proposed legislation; and legal requirements for environmental impact assessments, particularly to comply with NEPA. Much of our attention was directed to the June 24, 1974, opinion by a federal appellate court that the terms “ruin,” “monument,” and “antiquity,” as used in the 1906 Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities (the Antiquities Act), are “*fatally vague* in violation of the due process clause of the Constitution” (Opinion 74-1177, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit). This opinion rendered portions of the Antiquities Act unenforceable in much of the western United States and exposed the risk that similar opinions could follow in other jurisdictions. Consequently, our seminar participants spent many hours discussing implications of the court’s opinion and three possible responses: filing an appeal to the Supreme Court, promulgating new regulations to remedy the statutory deficiencies identified by the appellate court, or crafting a new statute. After weighing the possible advantages and drawbacks of each approach, we concluded that “there seems considerable merit in the idea of drafting an altogether new law which might effect better protections for a wider range of heritage data” than is feasible under provisions of the Antiquities Act (Moratto 1977:17).

Question 2: From your perspective, how did the Airlie House report impact the development of American archaeology? In my view, the Arlie House report did not so much “impact” as it did *reflect* the intellectual currents of American archaeology in 1974, when the seminars were held, and in 1977, when the report was published. All of the broad topics addressed in the report—archaeology and Native Americans, professional certification and accreditation, the communication crisis, the legal context for archaeology, cultural resource management, and preparing archaeological reports—had long been subjects of concern, and each had been discussed extensively in the archaeological literature. This said, I do think the Airlie

House report was a milepost in the history of American archaeology in that it focused attention on these six topics and presented concise summaries of current thinking about them, often with recommendations for further action.

The Airlie House report did *not* represent *le fin ou le début d'une époque*. Rather, it was a high-water mark along the stream of ideas that had flowed from archaeological sources for decades before 1977 and would continue to flow for decades thereafter (e.g., King 1998, 2002; King et al. 1977; McManamon et al. 2008; Portnoy 1978; Schiffer and Gumerman 1977; Smith and Ehrenhard 1991; Spiess 1978). There have been both theoretical and concrete advances since 1977 pertaining to each of the subjects considered during the Airlie House seminars. With respect to archaeology and Native Americans, perhaps the most significant changes have been the passage in 1989 and implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the general improvement in relationships between archaeologists and Native communities (see Swidler et al. 1997). This is not to say that the enactment of NAGPRA and better mutual understanding between archaeologists and Indigenous peoples was a direct outcome of breakthroughs at Airlie House; only that the issues deliberated and the advice developed at the conference center in Virginia may have helped pave the way for later, further progress by informed people of goodwill among both constituencies.

With respect to professional certification and accreditation, the link is much stronger between Airlie House proposals and the resultant creation in 1977 of the Society of Professional Archaeologists (SOPA), which in 1998 evolved into the Register of Professional Archaeologists (RPA). In fact, the present RPA is even more like what the Airlie House seminar participants envisioned than was its predecessor, SOPA. Not long after the Airlie House report appeared, the federal government also formally considered the matter of professional qualifications. Under the

authority of Sections 101(f–h) and 110 of the NHPA, the NPS in 1983 issued *Archeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines* (48 FR 44716-44742), which included professional standards for history, archaeology, architectural history, and historic architecture. These professional standards, while not as robust as some would like, were nonetheless stimulated and influenced by recommendations in the Airlie House report.

It is more difficult to assess the “impact” of the Airlie House seminar on “the crisis in communication.” Discussants in that seminar clearly recognized that archaeologists must communicate effectively, not only with one another but also with external audiences, most notably the general public. There can be no doubt that the first kind of communication is now better than ever due to email, blogs, digital publishing, the proliferation of journals, and publications such as the *SAA Archaeological Record*. None of these advances was foreseen in 1974. Substantial work, however, remains to be done to improve communications with non-archaeologists. Two notable success stories in this arena are *American Archaeology*, published by the Archaeological Conservancy since 1996, and *Archaeology*, now in its 76th year as the flagship magazine of the Archaeological Institute of America; but neither of these fine publications owes its origins or growth to the Airlie House sessions. The scope of *Archaeology* is global, while *American Archaeology* tends to focus mostly on North America. Perhaps the public communication goals set nearly a half-century ago at Airlie House could be met, at least partly, if the SAA were to launch a new popular journal or magazine devoted to archaeology of the Americas.

Tangible results of the seminar on “archaeology and the law” are easy to identify. The fatal deficiencies in the 1906 Antiquities Act (discussed above) were remedied by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), passed by Congress and signed by President

Carter in 1979, just two years after the Airlie House report was issued. Together with its implementing regulations (43 CFR 7 and others), ARPA affords *much* stronger protection of archaeological resources on federal and tribal lands than did the 1906 act (see Hutt et al. 1992). ARPA also authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to issue regulations to protect artifacts and data gathered in accordance with several federal laws. Accordingly, in 1990 the NPS published *Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archaeological Collections* (36 CFR 79). Although the SAA, federal agencies, and professional archaeologists throughout the country invested a great deal of effort to secure the enactment of ARPA and issuance of its regulations, the discussions at Airlie House laid important foundations for these successful political and legislative efforts.

The role of the Airlie House seminar on “cultural resource management” was certainly important because the discussants were able to identify, examine, and summarize a remarkably wide array of entailed issues: legal imperatives, various kinds of project impacts, evaluating significance and data potentials, compliance procedures, the needs of various stakeholders, communication requirements, research within CRM contexts, and much more (McMillan et al. 1977). However, many of these issues were already “in the air” that American archaeologists were breathing, and they were being deliberated actively before the Airlie House seminars took place (e.g., Lipe and Lindsay 1974). Still, the sponsorship of the Airlie House sessions and report by the NPS and SAA brought the essential tenets of CRM to the attention of broad national audiences and helped lay the footings for the CRM skyscraper that would arise thereafter. Thus, while acknowledging that CRM was part of the early 1970s zeitgeist, and that it was not created *de novo* in the tranquil conference center near Warrenton, Virginia, it is nonetheless true that the Airlie House seminar gave CRM a healthy nudge forward.

The remaining seminar topic, “guidelines for the preparation and evaluation of archaeological reports,” is closely tied not only to CRM but also to law and communications. The seminar report (Vivian 1977) perceptively defines several classes of reports—for example, archaeological overviews, assessment reports, reconnaissance reports, reports of intensive field studies, mitigation reports, et cetera—and provides guidelines for the organization and contents of each. In retrospect, the post-1977 history of archaeological reporting has proven to be a good deal more complex than anticipated at Airlie House, due to such factors as the diverse compliance requirements of federal and state laws, regulatory prescriptions, case law outcomes, agency format preferences, specific project needs, and contract stipulations. Nonetheless, the Airlie House seminar on this topic provided excellent initial guidance for practitioners who would be responsible for preparing various types of archaeological reports.

Question 3: What did the report miss? What could have been done differently or better? The Airlie House seminar participants were never given a crystal ball and even now, looking back nearly a half-century with the clarity of 20/20 hindsight, I cannot see that they missed much that reasonably might have been foreseen, or could have done things significantly better. Obviously they could not fully anticipate some of the major changes to come in later decades, such as the passage of the NAGPRA and its effects on archaeological collections and museum practices, or the great diversity of property types that CRM would come to embrace (King 2003, 2011), or the explosive growth of CRM as an industry apart from academia. Nor could they possibly have imagined the future revolutionary advances in technology (personal computers, email, blogs, total stations, GPS, and all the rest), or new dating techniques, or the incredible advances made possible by DNA analysis.

Some changes were already underway, such as the increasing participation of women,

Indigenous peoples, and other minorities in archaeological practice and professional society membership. These were surely recognized, but not emphasized, in the selection of Airlie House participants and the chosen seminar topics, except of course those related to Native Americans. The Airlie House discussions in 1974 were not concerned with gender identity as an archaeological subject, or with unknowable future theoretical paradigm shifts—for example, the decline of processualism, rise of ecological archaeology, postmodern deconstruction and decolonization—or with such practical issues as how archaeologists should react to a pandemic or resolve the looming professional labor shortage. As a participant in the Airlie House sessions, I do not think that that my colleagues there should be faulted for standing firmly on the turf of their own era and not being able to see decades beyond the horizon visible in 1974. It seems to me more sensible to appreciate both the assessments of contemporary problems and the sound recommendations for action in the *foreseeable* future that were advanced in the Airlie House report.

References Cited

Chapman, Carl H. (editor)

1973 Archaeology in the 70s—Mitigating the Impact: A Symposium Held at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, San Francisco, California, May 3, 1973. *Missouri Archaeologist* 35(1–2).

Hutt, Sherry, Elwood W. Jones, and Martin E. McAllister

1992 *Archeological Resource Protection*. Preservation Press, Washington, DC.

King, Thomas F.

1998 *Cultural Resource Laws and Practice: An Introductory Guide*. AltaMira Press,

Walnut Creek, California.

2002 *Thinking about Cultural Resource Management: Essays from the Edge*. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

2003 *Places That Count: Traditional Cultural Properties in Cultural Resource Management*. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

King, Thomas F. (editor)

1970 *Death of the Past: A Report to the People of California*. Society for California Archaeology, Daly City.

2011 *A Companion to Cultural Resource Management*. Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, Massachusetts.

King, Thomas F., Patricia Parker Hickman, and Gary Berg

1977 *Anthropology and Historic Preservation: Caring for Culture's Clutter*. Academic Press, New York.

Lipe, William D., and Alexander J. Lindsay Jr. (editors)

1974 *Proceedings of the 1974 Cultural Resource Management Conference, Federal Center, Denver, Colorado*. Museum of Northern Arizona Technical Series 14. Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art, Flagstaff.

McGimsey, Charles R., III

1972 *Public Archaeology*. Seminar Press, New York.

McGimsey, Charles R. III, and Hester A. Davis (editors)

1977 *The Management of Archeological Resources: The Airlie House Report*. Special Publication of the Society for American Archaeology, Washington, DC.

McManamon, Francis P., Andrew Stout, and Jodi Barnes (editors)

2008 *Managing Archaeological Resources: Global Context, National Programs, Local Actions*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California.

McMillan, Bruce, Mark Grady, and William Lipe (compilers)

1977 Cultural Resource Management. In *The Management of Archeological Resources: The Airlie House Report*, edited by Charles R. McGimsey III and Hester A. Davis. pp. 25–77. Special Publication of the Society for American Archaeology, Washington, DC.

Moratto, Michael J.

1973a *The Status of California Archaeology*. Special Publication of the Society for California Archaeology and the University of California, Riverside.

1973b California's Heritage in Crisis. *California Geology* 26(2):46–47.

1974 Archaeology in the Far West. In “Archaeology in the 70s—Mitigating the Impact: A Symposium Held at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, San Francisco, California, May 3, 1973,” edited by Carl H. Chapman. *Missouri Archaeologist* 35(1–2):19–30.

Moratto, Michael J. (compiler)

1977 A Consideration of Law in Archeology. In *The Management of Archeological Resources: The Airlie House Report*, edited by Charles R. McGimsey III and Hester A. Davis, pp. 8–24. Special Publication of the Society for American Archaeology, Washington, DC.

Pastron, Allen G., Patrick S. Hallinan, and C. William Clewlow Jr. (editors)

1973 *The Crisis in North American Archaeology*. Kroeber Anthropological Society Special Publication 3. University of California, Berkeley.

Portnoy, Alice (editor)

1978 *Scholars as Managers, Or How Can the Managers Do It Better*. US Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Washington, DC.

Schiffer, Michael B., and George J. Gumerman

1977 *Conservation Archaeology: A Guide for Cultural Resources Management*. Academic Press, New York.

Smith, George S., and John E. Ehrenhard (editors)

1991 *Protecting the Past*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, Florida.

Spiess, Arthur E. (editor)

1978 *Conservation Archaeology in the Northeast: Toward a Research Orientation*. Peabody Museum Bulletin 3. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Swidler, Nina, Kurt E. Dongoske, Roger Anyon, and Alan Downer (editors)

1997 *Native Americans and Archaeologists: Stepping Stones to Common Ground*. AltaMira Press, in cooperation with the Society for American Archaeology, Walnut Creek, California.

Vivian, Gwinn (compiler)

1977 Guidelines for the Preparation and Evaluation of Archeological Reports with Particular Reference to Cultural Resource Management Studies. In *The Management of Archeological Resources: The Airlie House Report*, edited by Charles R. McGimsey III and Hester A. Davis, pp. 8–24. Special publication of the Society for American Archaeology, Washington, DC.