



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

September 28, 2022

Kimi Yoshino
Editor in Chief
Baltimore Banner
3620 Majestic Lane
Bowie, MD 20715

Dear Ms. Yoshino,

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) writes to add its response to that of the Council for Maryland Archaeology's (CfMA) letter sent to your publication, regarding the August 19, 2022, "Way Down in the Hole" article that covered the activities of Evan Woodard, who operates a business excavating historic privy pits in Baltimore.

The SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 5,500 members, the SAA represents professional and avocational archaeologists, archaeology students in colleges and universities, and archaeologists working at tribal agencies, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. The SAA has members throughout the United States, as well as in many nations around the world.

The archaeological record is precious, fragile, and nonrenewable. Sites that are excavated can never be re-excavated—the critical contextual relations between the archaeological materials are gone forever. Scientific and professional archaeologists are careful to preserve buried history whenever possible. Excavations are conducted only after consideration of other, less destructive alternatives; consultation with descendant and other appropriate communities; and the securing of any necessary permissions from landowners as well as permits from federal, state, or local authorities. The scope and scale of digs are carefully calibrated to achieve the maximum contribution to knowledge, with the minimum necessary damage to the sites. All components of the excavation process, including contextual relations, are recorded and documented for future reference. Artifacts collected during archaeological projects are examined, curated, and stored so they can be made available for future researchers, educators, and public exhibits.

Among the SAA's long-standing Principles of Archaeological Ethics are the following:

Principle No. 1 Stewardship: The archaeological record, that is, in situ archaeological material and sites, archaeological collections, records and reports, is irreplaceable. It is the responsibility of all archaeologists to work for the long-term conservation and protection of the archaeological record by practicing and promoting stewardship of the archaeological record. Stewards are both caretakers of and advocates for the archaeological record for the benefit of all people; as they investigate and interpret the record, they should use the specialized knowledge they gain to promote public understanding and support for its long-term preservation.

Principle No. 3 Commercialization: The Society for American Archaeology has long recognized that the buying and selling of objects out of archaeological context is contributing to the destruction of the archaeological record on the American continents and around the world. The commercialization of archaeological objects—their use as commodities to be exploited for personal enjoyment or profit—results in the destruction of archaeological sites and of contextual information that is essential to understanding the archaeological record. Archaeologists should therefore carefully weigh the benefits to scholarship of a project against the costs of potentially enhancing the commercial value of archaeological objects. Whenever possible they should discourage, and should themselves avoid, activities that enhance the commercial value of archaeological objects, especially objects that are not curated in public institutions, or readily available for scientific study, public interpretation, and display.

The selling of certain archaeological artifacts is also prohibited by federal law pursuant to the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979).

These practices and principles do not apply only to professional archaeologists. Amateur and avocational archaeologists can and should exercise responsible research. The SAA operates an extensive public education program designed to inform and instruct those individuals seeking to learn about and explore their history.

Archaeology is principled. Those of us who have the privilege of taking part in and adding to the rich history of this work must be mindful of what we do and how we do it, and that includes Mr. Woodard.

We would be happy to provide you resources on archaeological practices or to reach out if we can help in any way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Sandweiss', with a horizontal line underneath.

Daniel H. Sandweiss, PhD, RPA
President