



2013

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## Recommended Citation

Scott, Katelyn S., "Native American Projectile Points: What Stories Can They Tell Us?" (2013). *Honors Projects*. Paper 46. [http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth\\_honproj/46](http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj/46)

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Native American Projectile Points: What Stories Can They Tell Us?

Katelyn Scott

April 25, 2013

## Introduction

Collecting projectile points, or arrowheads as they are commonly called, has been a popular pastime for more than a century in the United States. Amateur collectors often have a great passion for finding points; however, they typically collect them for pure enjoyment and often do not record detailed information about their discoveries. This objective diverges from the scientific approach that motivates professional archaeologists to collect projectile points, which is to learn about the people who made them. When projectile points are collected without recording detailed contextual information, much of the collection's scientific value is lost. Therefore, when private collections that have not been properly documented are acquired by museums, libraries or universities it is much more difficult to learn from them. The research under discussion focuses on such a collection of projectile points in the Tate Archives and Special Collections in The Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan University (IWU). This paper will describe the process I used to catalog the collection, the many complications I encountered throughout the cataloging process, and the display I created on the first floor of The Ames Library in order to showcase and educate the public about the IWU collection. In conjunction with the discussion of the IWU projectile point collection, this paper provides deeper insight into projectile points generally.

Projectile points are an easily recognizable object to most Americans. In fact, according to Frédéric Sellet, author of *A Changing Perspective on PaleoIndian Chronology and Typology: A view from the Northwestern Plains* (2001), "The stone projectile point is one of the most readily recognizable implements of lithic assemblages" (1). Despite this fact, very few people realize how much about Native American prehistory can be learned from projectile points and the extent to which archaeologists study them. Due to Native Americans' close connection to the land, many Native American artifacts were made out of natural materials that over time disintegrated, leaving behind no traces for archaeologists to study. Stone projectile points and debitage, waste material that results when a stone tool is created, have survived and therefore are some of the best clues archaeologists have about Native American cultures (Sellet 2001). Projectile points are temporally and spatially ubiquitous. Well-preserved and complete projectile points contain culturally sensitive information with regard to function and time. Since projectile point shape and size changed over time, they provide archaeologists with the means to develop a cultural/historical chronology of Native American peoples (M. Wiant, personal communication, March 29, 2013). This makes projectile points an important and highly regarded class of artifacts. If professional archaeologists want amateur collectors to invest more time and effort

into their collections, it is their responsibility to encourage and educate collectors about the information projectile points can yield.

There are three general subclasses of projectile points: spear, dart, and arrow points (see Figure 1). Arrow points are the smallest projectile points and are, as the name suggests, attached to arrow shafts. Dart points are larger than arrow points, fastened to a wooden shaft, and propelled with a spear thrower or atlatl. Spear points are generally larger than dart points and are hafted to longer shafts that were thrust or thrown by hand at the intended target. Larger spears appear to have been also used as knives, which were fastened to a foreshaft that served as a handle and could be detached from the spear (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012).

This is the language I had to learn as I moved through my research. As I delved into the literature, I quickly picked up on the meanings of these terms, each of which are essential to understanding and cataloging projectile points.

### Literature Review

As projectile points are one of the most common artifacts found and studied in the Native American archaeological record, I predicted that there would be a significant amount of literature on the subject, and I was correct. The literature touches on a wide variety of information, ranging from the more general, such as what can be inferred from projectile points, to incredibly detailed information about specific point types as described in point guides. In addition to projectile point scholars, I consulted museum and collection management sources. The sources I consulted throughout my research can be categorized into nine groups based on similar topics including: 1) what can be inferred from projectile points, 2) collecting points and the pitfalls associated with collecting, 3) interpreting archaeology to the public, 4) museum and collection management, 5) point guides, 6) projectile point typology, 7) numbering projectile points, 8) how other museums have displayed projectile points, 9) and how to create displays.

Once I decided to catalog the IWU collection, point guides were an essential tool. Point guides are the result of typological studies of projectile points. These guides help define the



**Figure 1-** The projectile points in this image are part of the IWU Ames collection. These objects illustrate the four types of projectile points found in the IWU collection. From left to right: a knife, spear, dart, and arrow point.

Photo by Kate Scott

known point types throughout the United States, providing information such as the region in which the point can be found, a physical description, and sketches of the different variations of each point type. Archaeologists Robert Bell, Gregory Perino, and Noel Justice are well-known authors of point guides. Together, Bell and Perino (1971-1973) wrote an extensive four-volume set of point guides that list a variety of point types known in the Midwest and the Plains. All four of these guides were incredibly helpful. They allowed me to narrow down a few of the projectile points in the collection to a specific point type and provided clues to where the collection might have come from. Justice, author of *Stone Age Spear and Arrow Points of the Midcontinental and Eastern United States: A Modern Survey and Reference* (1987), conducted his own typological study and published several point guides. *Handbook of Alabama Archaeology* (1969) by James Cambron & David Hulse, was also an invaluable resource. While none of the projectile points in the IWU collection are thought to be from the Alabama region, the beginning of this book contains charts that outline the different types of bases, stems and notches that projectile points may have. These charts were instrumental to my understanding of projectile point stem shapes.

In order to sort the IWU collection, I consulted many sources on projectile point classification. While the point guides were useful in identifying specific point types, they failed to help me devise a more general way of sorting the collection. Etienne Bernardeau Renaud, author of *Classification and Description of Arrowheads* (1935), provides a step-by-step explanation of the different degrees of detail by which projectile points can be categorized. Renaud's simplistic approach to sorting points convinced me that cataloging the IWU collection by stem shape was the best method, a decision I will discuss in more detail later on.

After all of the points were sorted by stem type, I had to choose a method for attaching an accession number to each of the points. Thomas Braun, author of *An Alternative Technique for Applying Accession Numbers to Museum Artifacts* (2007), was highly influential in this decision. Braun discusses in detail the specific numbering process I elected to use. He also furthered my understanding of the different methods used for applying accession numbers to artifacts. A *Collections Research News* article (2005) addresses the significance of accession numbers on artifacts, which helped me understand the importance of assigning accession numbers to each of the points in the collection, which will be further addressed later on.

One of the main questions I hoped to answer about the IWU projectile point collection was: what information can be inferred from the points in terms of the lifestyle of the people who made them? To help me answer this question, I researched what has been inferred from other

projectile points found at archaeological sites. For example, Briggs Buchanan, Mark Collard, Marcus Hamilton and Michael O'Brien, authors of *Points and Prey: A Quantitative Test of the Hypothesis that Prey Size Influences Early Paleoindian Projectile Point Form* (2011), discuss how some archaeologists believe that prey size has a direct influence on the type and size of projectile points. This literature advanced my understanding of how the types of animals Native Americans hunted and consumed, such as bison and mastodons, can be inferred from examining projectile points.

Another major component of my research addresses the fascination people have with collecting projectile points and the issues that result from this popular pastime. As I consulted the literature, I learned about the pitfalls associated with projectile point collecting and realized these were the root causes of the many challenges I faced with the IWU collection. Greta vanBree, author of *Artifact Hunting* (2012, September 14), provides a detailed account of a collector, Jonathan Griswold. Jonathan's story confirmed that people who collect projectile points often assemble a large collection. Yet, if collectors such as Griswold do not keep proper records, a great deal of scientific information can be lost.

To address the issues presented by projectile point collecting, I consulted literature regarding the interpretation and preservation of archaeology. Alexandra Chan is the author of *Translating Archaeology for the Public: Empowering and Engaging Museum Goers with the Past* (2011). As a professional archaeologist, she is in the perfect position to discuss the best strategies for interpreting archaeology to the general public. Chan advanced my understanding of why and how archaeology should be explained to the public through exhibits. Cece Nunn, author of *Artifacts Under Your Feet: What to do When a Rock is More Than a Rock* (2010), addresses the issue of how everyday collectors of projectile points often do not know the proper archaeological procedures for handling or recording information about artifacts. Nunn helped me appreciate what information is necessary for projectile points to retain their scientific value.

To make sure that I was managing and cataloging the collection of projectile points in the proper manner, I turned to scholars on museum and collection management such as Ralph Lewis (1976), chief of the National Park Service Museum Branch from 1954-64 and George Ellis Burcaw (1983), senior examiner for the Accreditation Commission for the American Association of Museums. The work of Lewis and Burcaw educated me on the proper ways to care for and catalog a collection of artifacts. They greatly influenced the way I decided to catalog the IWU projectile point collection. In addition, Lewis and Burcaw deepened my knowledge of how to create a temporary exhibit. Even though the display I created is much smaller than what Lewis

and Burcaw describe, I tried to follow their suggestions as I created the concept for my display. As I continued to develop my display, I decided to visit other museums to see how they present projectile points.

I also consulted written sources that discuss how other museums have displayed projectile points. Susan Berry (2006), former director of the Silver Springs Museum in New Mexico and Gwyneira Isaac, author of *What Are Our Expectations Telling Us? Encounters with the NMAI* (2006), drew from their museum backgrounds to provide insight and critique the way Native American artifacts are displayed at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Berry, in particular, talks about how the projectile points are displayed. Both Berry and Isaac furthered my understanding of different ways Native American objects have been displayed in museums.

Another important aspect of my display is the text. I wanted to frame the projectile points in a context, but did not want the cases to become too crowded. John Falk and Lynn Dierking, authors of *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (2000), discuss the different types of people who visit museums and how each of them looks at and interprets exhibits differently, which helped me determine my target audience. Once I determined that my audience would be the Illinois Wesleyan student body, I realized my text needed to speak to students. Beverly Serrell, author of *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach* (1996), provided instruction on how I could write concise, yet engaging text for my intended audience.

## Methods

My work with the IWU collection of Native American projectile points began two years ago as a volunteer project. Meg Miner, the Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, asked if there were any anthropology majors interested in working on documenting a collection of projectile points. I immediately expressed an interest. Since then sorting, numbering, photographing and creating a database for this collection has been a goal of mine.

In order to carry out a research project of this magnitude, I employed several different methods. The two methods I used the most were assigning an accession number to each point and classifying the projectile points according to a series of attributes. I went to the archives twice a week and spent time sorting and assigning accession numbers to the collection of 1,129 projectile points. In order to determine which attributes to observe and document, I referred to the collection management and projectile typology literature as well as relying on the expertise

of museum professionals and archaeologists. The projectile point typology literature taught me how to sort and document a collection of projectile points, but the collection management literature advanced my understanding of the importance of accession numbers and how to assign them to each point.

Once I began to work with this collection, I realized cataloging the IWU collection on my own was an impossible task. Despite my dedicated research, there was much about projectile points and collection management that I did not know. As Lewis (1976) explains, “when personal experience, the available reference books, and opportunities for comparisons have been exhausted, consider the determination of the object as still tentative. Have a specialist in that particular category of objects confirm, refine or correct it” (55). Therefore, I took Lewis’ advice and began consulting with museum professionals and projectile point experts.

First, I reached out to Mr. William Iseminger, Associate Director of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site in Collinsville, Illinois, who is an archeologist with extensive expertise in projectile points. I asked if he would be willing to meet with me over the summer to look at the collection and he agreed. In order to take the collection home, I went through the archives’ formal loan agreement process, which included filling out paperwork and being versed in the proper way to care for the collection. I traveled to Cahokia Mounds three times to consult with Mr. Iseminger on the IWU collection and conducted an interview with him. My meetings with Mr. Iseminger were a great starting point to learning and understanding how projectile points are classified. In addition to his knowledge of projectile points, Mr. Iseminger advised me on strategies for numbering the points and provided ideas for displaying the collection.

Dr. Michael Wiant, Director of Dickson Mounds State Museum in Lewistown, Illinois, also an archaeologist with considerable experience with projectile points, was the greatest contributor to my research. His position as the Director of Dickson Mounds and his background as an archaeologist brought both knowledge of collection management and projectile point expertise to the project. Dr. Wiant helped me throughout every stage of my research, not only lending me numerous point guides so I could familiarize myself with the different types of projectile points that exist, but also helping me with my ambitious goal of sorting and assigning numbers to each point in the collection. Throughout the fall semester of 2012 and the spring of 2013, we met weekly in the IWU archives, sorting the points by stem shape, bagging and assigning a number to each one, and creating a database with as much descriptive information as we could provide for every point. As we worked together creating the database, Dr. Wiant taught me how to roughly identify different stem shapes as well as whether a point was a knife,



spear, dart, or arrow point. I learned skills and information about projectile point classification from him that I could have never taught myself by simply reading a book. In addition to meeting to work on the collection, I interviewed Dr. Wiant to obtain more information on what archaeologists know about projectile points and about the history of collecting them.

Dr. Edward Jelks, an archaeologist and former professor at Illinois State University who resides in Normal, Illinois, was the third expert I brought in to help with my research. In searching the boxes the collection was housed in, I noticed the name Edward Jelks and the year 1975 written on all of them. I brought Dr. Jelks in to look at the collection, hoping he would recognize it and could provide some insight on where it came from and how it ended up at Illinois Wesleyan. Once Dr. Wiant and I began sorting the points, we realized some of them could be from the Texas area. Dr. Jelk's region of expertise is the Southern Plains and Midwest. Since we had no information on where the collection was from, we hoped Dr. Jelks would also be able to confirm our hypothesis that some of the projectile points were indeed from the Texas region.

In mid-fall of 2012, Dr. Jelks came to the archives to look at the collection. Although he did not recall the collection, he was able to identify some of the points as specifically Texas types. Through an interview I conducted with Dr. Jelks, I learned more about projectile point typology, what archaeologists have been able to infer from projectile points, and the challenges that accompany identifying a collection of artifacts without any provenance such as the IWU collection.

In the last phase of this project, I developed a display in The Ames Library that showcased pieces from the IWU collection. I felt it was important to have a visual representation of my research and findings as well as provide the campus community an opportunity to see a portion of the IWU projectile point collection. I spent time researching how other museums display projectile points and then created my own concept for a display. In addition to visiting other museums, I reviewed literature on exhibit labels and creating temporary exhibits. As an anthropology major with an interest in Museum Studies, this aspect of the project allowed me to utilize and incorporate the curatorial skills I have acquired over the last few years through a Museum Studies course and several museum internships.

### What Have Projectile Points Been Able to Tell Us?

Projectile points can provide great insight into the daily lives of Native Americans because they have the potential to tell more detailed stories about raw material acquisition, design, method of

manufacture, use, rejuvenation and repair, mobility, settlement, trade and exchange and cultural/historical affiliation that are not otherwise observable. Perhaps the most easily made inference about projectile points is that they show how technology has changed over time. Projectile points show an observable variation that can be attributed to differences in culture (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). The shape of points alone can often tell an archaeologist how the tool was made and thereby reveal changes and advances in flintknapping techniques (W. Iseminger, personal communication, October 19, 2012). These differences in flintknapping techniques show how technology varied and advanced throughout Native American history.

Native American trade systems, types of exchange and mobility patterns can also be inferred from projectile points (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). Certain kinds of rock are only available in specific areas of the United States. If projectile points found in one location were made from rock that is only available in a region far away, it suggests that Native American tribes engaged in trade. Sometimes archaeologists are even able to discern who the trading partners were (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012).

Diet and hunting practices have also been inferred from projectile points. Projectile points lodged into the bones of animals have been discovered at several archaeological sites, allowing archaeologists to infer which animals were hunted and used for their meat and/or for their hides. In fact, according to archaeologists Buchanan, Collard, Hamilton and O'Brien (2011), "four sites have yielded complete Clovis points that can be linked with bison remains—Blackwater Draw (New Mexico), Jake Bluff (Oklahoma), Murray Springs (Arizona), and Lehner (Arizona)...At the first three sites, Clovis points were found next to bison remains, but at Lehner "one was recovered from within the ribs of a bison" (853). Dickson Mounds State Museum also has an example of a projectile point that was discovered lodged in a bison bone (see Figure 2) (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). In addition to the types of animals that were hunted, projectile points provide clues to the extent of a group's



**Figure 2-** This projectile point, lodged in the bone of a bison, was recovered at the Lonza site near Mapleton, Illinois and dates to about 300 B.C. This is evidence that Native Americans used projectile points to hunt bison.

Photo courtesy of Dickson Mounds State Museum

hunting grounds and how they moved on the landscape.

If a particular group made a distinctive point, archaeologists can plot the distribution of the point type and determine how far the group traveled (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012).

While each of these examples shows that projectile points have the capability of providing significant clues about the lifestyle of Native Americans, it must be remembered that each of these scenarios has been inferred. Archaeologists read the artifacts in order to tell a story about them, but not all inferences are created equally and some have a much higher probability of being accurate (E. Jelks, personal communication, November 16, 2012). So while projectile points have the potential to give archaeologists important cultural information, there is always the chance that the archaeologist will not be able to infer an accurate scenario from them.

### The Purpose of Projectile Point Typology

In order to make inferences about changes in technology over time and trading patterns, it is vital that archaeologists have an understanding of what point and material types are popular in certain regions and time periods. Projectile points vary greatly in their physical characteristics as well as their intended functions. In order to make sense of such a complex class of artifacts, archaeologists rely on typology. Projectile point typology is a means of organizing points on the basis of physical attributes that one may link to a particular thing (e.g., raw material source) or action (e.g., means of production or use).

Projectile points are divided into three broad categories: spear/knife, dart, and arrow, each reflecting a different means of propulsion: arm, arm-assisted, and bow (M. Wiant, personal communication, March 29, 2013). Within these three categories, however, there are hundreds of specific types of spear, dart and arrow points, which vary greatly in shape and style based on time period, cultural identities, and function (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). Having a system of named points allows archaeologists to more quickly identify a point. Archaeologists can easily find out more about the time period, the region in which the point is most commonly found, or the people who made it by consulting one of the many projectile point guides that have been written by archaeologists, who focus on projectile point typology, such as authors Perino and Bell (1971-1973).

Projectile point typologies are even more important when the points that need to be identified have been removed from their archaeological context. In this case, the only

information available about them is what has been written in a guide or report about the type. While projectile point typologies can be helpful to archaeologists and those who are collecting for their own enjoyment, one should be aware that typological studies have their shortcomings (Sellet 2001). As Renaud (1935) notes,

So far all systems of arrowhead classification have failed because they were too complex and, therefore impractical for the amateur and the field man...their authors did not start from a simple and basic principle...[or] ...they multiplied the classes or types and sub-types of points to the extreme instead of concerning themselves only with the main features, and allowing each collector to create whatever subdivisions he needed to suit the wants of his district or his desire for detailed description (5).

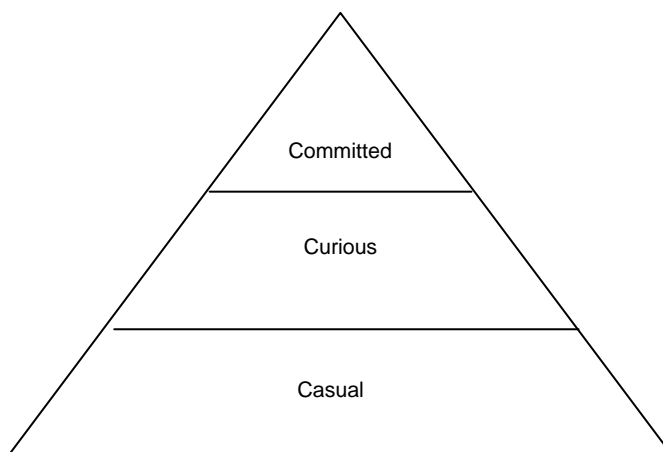
Typological studies of projectile points have become overly elaborate throughout the years. These new complex typologies were designed for professional archaeologists. This makes it difficult for amateur collectors to keep up and they can no longer sort the points they find on their own, an issue I will discuss in depth later on.

### The History of Projectile Point Collecting

Human beings have an innate curiosity, and collecting objects of any kind provides us with an outlet for this curiosity (Bricker 1951, 15). According to Dr. Wiant, people who collect may be divided into one of three groups: “casual”, “curious” or “committed” (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). These three types of collectors can be represented by a pyramid diagram (see Figure 3). Casual collectors are the most numerous.

They are interested in projectile points but they are not concerned with collecting the detailed and necessary information on the items they collect. This group includes the people who find projectile points on their property as well as those who stumble upon them while out on a walk. “Casual” collectors collect projectile points for several reasons: they find the objects to be aesthetically pleasing, they believe they make a neat story, they are interested in their potential monetary value.

The second group of collectors is people who are genuinely “curious” about the information and stories projectile points can tell. Many of these collectors consider themselves avocational archaeologists and have a deep interest in projectile points. They take great care in



**Figure 3-** This pyramid diagram shows the distribution of the different type of collectors.

Diagram by Kate Scott

recording information, such as where they found the points. Usually, “curious” collectors or avocational archaeologists take the time to research and learn as much as they can about the projectile points they discover.

The smallest number of collectors is a group committed to researching and learning about projectile points, and is generally made up of professional archaeologists. Professional archaeologists are passionate about what they find but they are first and foremost concerned with keeping detailed records of their findings and learning as much as they can about each individual artifact (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). Unlike “curious” collectors, they are trained in archaeological theories and methods, and paid by universities or museums for their work.

Collecting projectile points is a widely popular pastime. This practice begs the question: why would someone choose, out of all collectible Native American items (e.g. pottery, chipped stone tools: scrapers, drills, or flakes), to collect projectile points? One possible answer can be derived from Susan Pearce (1990), Director of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, when she states, “It is this potent combination of the strange and the familiar which makes the past so fascinating to us all” (1). People relate to projectile points because they are a type of tool that is no longer used today, yet they are familiar at the same time because they are so common in the archaeological record. We can make connections with projectile points, but there is still something foreign and mysterious about them. For collectors, the Native Americans left behind these little gifts to find and contemplate.

Projectile points are common artifacts in the archaeological record and so collecting them is relatively easy. Anyone who lives in North America has the chance of finding projectile points on his/her property or on the ground while out for a walk. Projectile points allow anybody who wants to be a collector of Native American artifacts to be one. While Native American jewelry and pottery are also found in the archaeological record, they are primarily located in middens that represent settlement sites. Projectile points are found wherever Native Americans went hunting or trading, and are therefore widely dispersed.

For professional archaeologists, projectile points have the potential to yield a wealth of knowledge. “Casual” collectors hinder these opportunities because they are not committed to giving the objects a “voice.” As a professional archaeologist told me, “If someone is going to collect, they are ethically bound to collect in a precise and responsible manner” (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). Even “casual” collectors have an obligation to collect certain information about a projectile point if they are going to take it out of context.

Collectors of all kinds are obligated to record particular information regarding the exact location of where the object was found. Robert Cooper, author of *Constitutional Law: Preserving Native American Cultural and Archaeological Artifacts* (1976), argues, "If it was obtained without employing the proper archaeological information gathering procedure, the importance of that object as a useful tool with which to study man's past is practically worthless" (102). The location of where an object was found is vital to the information that can be inferred from it, especially with regard to projectile points. If the points are removed from the site without recording the exact location in which they were found, not only is valuable information lost about those particular points, but also the other objects with cultural significance that could potentially be located at the same site might never be located. In addition, if a point is in perfect condition, narrowing it down to a specific point type is possible without locational information, but knowing its provenance makes identifying the people it belonged to much easier. On the other hand, if a point is broken, the specific point type might not be discernible. The only way to determine the region in which such a point was made and therefore the people who probably made it, is by determining where it was found.

As a boy, my grandfather was an avid collector of Native American projectile points. He and his friends regularly searched for them on the Appalachian Trail near their homes in Pennsylvania in order to add to their collections (see Figure 4). These boys would be categorized as "casual" collectors who were in it for the fun and challenge of finding as many projectile points as they could. While my grandfather eventually disposed of the majority of his collection, he passed down a few points to each of his daughters, my mother included. Recently, my mother passed those points on to me (see Figure 5). It truly is amazing to look down at a projectile point and realize that someone put time and effort into making it and someone else took time and effort into finding it again.



**Figure 4-** Photo of my grandfather, Bob Obenhouse, in his Boy Scout uniform. He often hiked on the Appalachian Trail near his home in Schuylkill Haven, PA and he collected arrowheads he found on his hikes

Photo by Charles Obenhouse



**Figure 5-** These projectile points are part of my grandfather's collection. While there are no formal records on them, we do know he collected them on the Appalachian Trail

Photo by Allan Scott

Another collector of projectile points is Jonathan Griswold of Nash County, North Carolina (vanBree 2012 1). Griswold, now twenty-five, found his first projectile point at the age of ten and he has been collecting ever since because of his love of Native American history. He hunts for projectile points from "April - July every day from the time he gets off work till dark, [and] all day Saturday and Sunday after church" (vanBree 2012, 1). His hard work has paid off. This year alone he found three hundred and seventy five projectile points.

When a collection, perhaps from a collector like Griswold, is accepted by a museum or library, it should have the following information: Who collected the collection, what objects are in the collection, where the objects were found, when the objects were found/the date of the objects, and if possible why and how the collector decided to collect these objects. This information allows archaeologists to make inferences about the points and build on our knowledge of Native American prehistory.

Based on the time and effort they put into finding points, many amateur collectors such as Griswold have a deep passion for projectile points. The projectile points that amateur collectors find have the potential to advance our understanding of Native American prehistory, but if the records identified as necessary by museum and archive collections are not kept for private collections, the collections lose their scientific value. Therefore, it is the job of professional archaeologists to encourage and assist amateur collectors who wish to learn more about their private collections.

### Resources Available to Collectors

There is so much about projectile points that only the most committed, professional archaeologists are able to determine. Therefore, when a person finds projectile points and wants to know more, s/he often brings the objects to a museum in order to have an expert take a look at them. Burcaw (1983) explains, "Assisting the general public to identify objects is one of the museum's public services" (111). It is no surprise that museums like Dickson Mounds State Museum and Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site host artifact identification days. Each year in late February or early March, Dickson Mounds welcomes hundreds of people to have the artifacts they have found examined by experts in the field. This event serves three purposes: to encourage artifact collectors to share what they have discovered, to allow them to benefit from the expertise of museum staff, and to give professional archaeologists and museum staff the opportunity to get a sense of the kind of artifacts that are being discovered in the area (M. Wiant, personal communication, March 13, 2013). While the event is still popular, Dr. Wiant told me attendance has begun to dwindle in recent years. The fact is that fewer people are collecting artifacts because farming techniques have changed, making it more difficult to find artifacts (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). In addition to hosting artifact identification days, Dickson Mounds is happy to open its doors to student researchers like me, who wish to learn more about Native American artifacts. I traveled to Dickson Mounds in order to photograph the collection, a process I will discuss in more detail later.

Cahokia Mounds also has an artifact identification day in September that draws a crowd of 20-30 people. According to Mr. Iseminger, they usually have 3-5 archaeologists present who are familiar with the materials from this area, including the historical period. Collectors can also make appointments to meet one on one with an expert. I personally met with Mr. Iseminger to look at my artifacts. Unfortunately, due to the lack of provenance of the collection and his unfamiliarity with the point types in the collection, Mr. Iseminger was unable to tell me very



much about the collection; however, he speculated that many of the points originated in the Southwest. (W. Iseminger, personal communication, October 19, 2012).

There are archaeological societies such as the Cahokia Archaeological Society and the Illinois Valley Archaeological Society that bring collectors, interested avocational archaeologists, and the curious together to share and discuss their interests. The Cahokia Archaeological Society meets the third Thursday of each month at Cahokia Mounds. According to Mr. Iseminger, "We have a guest speaker, video, or other program, followed by the business meeting. This is primarily an amateur organization, people of all ages and backgrounds that have an interest in archaeology, but includes professional members as well. We do not engage in buying or selling of artifacts, but emphasize proper archaeology and working with professionals, but some members have private collections" (W. Iseminger, personal communication, March 19, 2013). The Illinois Valley Archaeological Society meets monthly at Dickson Mounds for a lecture and business meeting, where there is an opportunity for show and tell.

Since the venues for learning about projectile points are limited and most of them require extensive reading, artifact identification days are the perfect place for all types of collectors to come and learn more about their artifacts. Collectors are provided with a more accurate picture of who used the point and the function it served, and learn about the story they can infer about the object, making the object more powerful and valuable to them than it was before.

There is relatively little literature on projectile points written for the average person. While point guides are an excellent tool for archaeological students and professional archaeologists, I learned they are less helpful to the average person who is curious about projectile points. Point guides are written by archaeologists for archaeologists; they are written in their own language with terms that the average person does not always understand (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). Since I had already done extensive reading on the subject of projectile points and had consulted with several experts, I was able to understand the language in the point guides a little better. There were still times, however, when I did not fully understand the description of a point type. Since point guides, which are one of the most basic sources for identifying and understanding projectile point typology, are written mainly for the professional archaeologist, this leaves the average person with hardly any resources to consult.

I believe the lack of projectile point literature written for the average person contributes significantly to the collecting problems that coincide with projectile points. "Casual" and even

“curious” collectors might be more inclined to record information and research the points they find if they had access to books that were written in a language they could more easily understand. Those who consider themselves avocational archaeologists may have the time to sit down with point guides and really get to know the terms associated with projectile point typology, but those who are merely “casual” collectors would never take the time to do this. If more projectile point guides and other literature about projectile points were written for the average person, this would allow collectors to find more information on their own and they would not have to rely as heavily on projectile point experts or museum professionals for answers.

### Research on and Documentation of the IWU Projectile Point Collection

Last spring, when it came time for me to choose a topic for research honors, I knew that the IWU projectile point collection would be the focus of my project. I had been working with this collection since my sophomore year, but I was never able to devote the time to it that it deserved. Using the projectile point collection as the basis for my research allowed me to finally accomplish what I had been trying to do for the last few years. This collection also gave me an outlet to combine my interest in anthropology and archaeology with my love of museum studies. While I have interned at several museums, none of them have provided me with a deep understanding of collection management. This project provided that for me.

My decision to focus my research honors project on the collection in the archives also weighed heavily on the fact that libraries and archives have certain standards for documenting artifacts and the collection in the IWU archives did not meet any of these standards. As Pearce (1990) describes, “Many collections are very large, and the creation of a complete documentation archives is so formidable and so resource-consuming a task that it has to be conceived as a long-term project, which will take years to complete and must be serviceable for many more years” (114). Ms. Miner did not have the time or the expertise to properly catalog and register the projectile point collection herself, yet she wanted the collection to be properly catalogued and described. I decided I would attempt both of these tasks as well as try to determine the provenance of the collection. Taking the time to research and catalog this collection for my honors research was not only beneficial for me, but for Illinois Wesleyan University as well. Working on the collection also enabled me to give back to the University before I graduated.

I soon found these tasks to be incredibly challenging. Burcaw (1983) explains, “...the first of Guthe’s four obligations of a museum [is] the obligation to build and maintain good

collections. The second obligation is that of records, without which the collections are worth little” (84). Not knowing exactly where the collection came from, who owned it, or how it ended up on Illinois Wesleyan’s campus severely limited its scientific potential (M. Wiant, personal communication, December 4, 2012). When this collection was found in the basement of Holmes Hall in 2007, nothing was known about it and Ms. Miner set to work trying to determine its origins. Without more information about to whom the projectile points belonged and where they came from, the future use of the collection was limited. There are several points that have numbers on them suggesting that someone else tried to catalog them in the past, but any documents that explain the cataloging system are missing. It is more likely that no records were ever made. Therefore, my goal was to provide context and meaning to the collection so that scholars can better access and utilize it in the future.

Previous research on the provenance of this collection unearthed an article in *The ARGUS* from January 15, 1965, that mentioned the acquisition of a collection of projectile points. The article, “Artifacts Collection Purchased” discusses the University’s acquisition of the John Krupp artifact collection, consisting of about 8,000 Native American objects, including 6,000 projectile points for “use and study by students in the anthropology, sociology, and art departments” (7). The article goes on to say that the collection was under the care of former IWU art professor, Dr. Fred Brian, who brought the artifacts to his home to be identified and sorted by IWU faculty and students (“Artifacts Collection Purchased” 1965).

In addition to *The ARGUS* article, I found a photograph and caption of artifacts from the Krupp collection in the 1965 *Wesleyana*, the IWU yearbook (Crawford 1965). I looked to see if any of the artifacts in the photo matched any of the points I was working with, but I was unable to do so. Another article discussing the John Krupp artifact collection was also discovered in the January 18, 1965 edition of *The Pantagraph* (Streckfuss 1965). I tried to track down the people mentioned in these articles; I hoped they would be able to confirm if the collection I was working with was in fact the one mentioned in *The ARGUS* article. Unfortunately, I was not able to get in touch with any of the people discussed in the article.

The dates on the boxes of artifacts provided me with another scenario for the collection’s provenance. Upon further inspection of the collection, we realized that the projectile points were wrapped in copies of the *Christian Science Monitor* dated 1975, the same date on the outside of the boxes. In addition, the newspapers were addressed to Illinois Wesleyan’s campus. After finding another possible date for when the collection arrived on campus, Ms. Miner consulted

with the Advancement Office thinking there would be documentation of some kind for a collection of this size, but no records of a projectile point collection were found.

Ideally, museums and libraries only accept collections with well-defined provenance, and apart from the John Wesley Powell pottery collection, the IWU archives do not house any material culture collections. If the points in the IWU collection are not part of the Krupp collection, it is a mystery why IWU would accept this collection. There are several possible scenarios that have been considered. A donor may have offered a generous monetary donation and stipulated that the collection be accepted as well. Another scenario is that a previous donor offered the collection to the University and in order to continue a good relationship with him/her, IWU accepted the collection. Yet another possibility is that a professor at the University collected the projectile points for his/her own use and left the collection behind when he/she retired due to their potential research value for students.

From these clues, there are two likely scenarios for the collection: it either found its way onto campus in 1975 and Dr. Jelks was called in to look at it as soon as the University acquired it or it is most likely part of the Krupp collection, but perhaps was looked at in 1975 by Jelks and then repackaged with 1975 newspapers.

Another obstacle I faced was that many of the points in the collection have either missing stems or blades. Points with missing stems are difficult to conclusively identify, so these points had to be removed from those being catalogued. These incomplete points, although still important to the archaeological record, hold less value with regard to the information that can be inferred from them. Questions concerning material of manufacture, design, method of manufacture, and perhaps use and repair may still be addressed, however.

The IWU collection also contains quite a few points that appeared to be reworked. These specimens created authenticity problems. It was hard to tell if the points had been reworked by their original manufacturers or if they had been reworked using modern flintknapping techniques. In addition, several clearly inauthentic specimens that were perhaps created as teaching tools are present in the collection. These pieces were separated out of the collection with the help of experts. Since teaching tools are part of this collection, it suggests that this collection may have been the property of a former IWU faculty member who used it in the classroom for educational purposes.

As a projectile point expert told me, "Each archaeologist has their area of specialty" (E. Jelks, personal communication, November 16, 2012). This means that professional archaeologists are so specialized that they usually are only able to identify artifacts from their

area of expertise. This is another clue that this collection was collected by a “casual” or “curious” collector and not a professional archaeologist because the projectile points in the IWU collection appear to be from a variety of locations throughout the United States, as is demonstrated below. If the projectile points were collected by a professional archaeologist, the points would most likely be from one region of the United States. Although archaeologists typically specialize in a specific region, such specializations have created problems for me throughout my research. For example, Dr. Jelk’s region of specialty is the Southern Plains and the Midwest. He was able to help us identify some of the points in the collection that were from the Texas region, but those points that were not from this region were unrecognizable to him. The same was true of Dr. Wiant and Mr. Iseminger, both of whom specialize in the Midwest. While they were able to narrow down some of the points to a specific point type, they were unfamiliar with the majority of the material and point types present in the IWU collection.

Since no more information was forthcoming about this collection, and we had no idea how the collection was formerly catalogued, I devised my own plan for cataloguing the collection with the help of experts in the field. When I was trying to decide how to catalog the IWU collection, I consulted with Mr. Iseminger, Dr. Jelks and Dr. Wiant. When I asked them how they would normally sort a collection of points, they said by time period. When archaeologists compare projectile points within the same region from different time periods, they notice distinct differences in the materials used and methods of manufacture. Since archaeologists specialize in one area and they are normally comparing projectile points within one region, sorting points by time period allows them to more easily show the public the progression in stone tool technology.

Unfortunately, since the projectile points in the IWU collection were from an unfamiliar location, sorting by time period was not a feasible option because a point type that might be Archaic in the Midwest might be classified as Woodland in another region since the same point types occurred throughout the United States at different times. There were several points in the collection that Dr. Wiant recognized. If they were from the Midwest they would have been constructed during the Archaic time period, but if they were from the Southwest they would have been made at a much later date. Soon it was obvious I needed to find a more basic method of cataloging the IWU collection. As Renaud (1935) describes, “a system of classification of arrowheads should be very simple and general in its scope. It should be based on the characteristics of an essential part while all other and secondary features could be used as modifiers of the type to express local and individual variations seen in specimens” (5). Dr. Wiant

and I decided to sort the collection by stem shape because stem shape can reveal details about the shape and age of projectile points as well as their function.

There are three main classifications for projectile points based on stems: stemless, stemmed, or based. Stemless points are those “where the base is not distinct from the body of the artifact” (see Figure 6), stemmed points are usually easily recognized because the stem is narrower than the body of the point, and based, or expanding stem points are called such because the base of the point is as broad or broader than the body of the point (Renaud 1935). According to Renaud’s classification system, in addition to sorting projectile points by these three broad stem type categories, “one may add that the base is either straight, convex, concave, or notched; as to description of edges, the sides are straight, concave, convex or with more or less marked shoulders...” (Renaud 1935, 6).

Initially, Dr. Wiant and I went through the collection of 1,129 projectile points and sorted them into two basic categories: stemless and stemmed. When we found points that were stemmed with corner notches and side notches we

separated these into different envelopes (see Figure 7). Even though the projectile points had been roughly sorted by stem type, I still wanted to try and sort them even further by determining as many specific point types in the collection as I could. In order to do this, I had to familiarize myself with as many point types as possible by going through all of the point guides that Dr. Wiant had lent to me (see Bell, Bozhardt, Cambron & Hulse, Justice, Perino, and Waldorf). To make identifying point types in the collection easier, I started to compile and organize a database of all the point types I read about in the point guides based on stem type. I put all of the specific corner-notched points on one sheet and all of the contracting stem points on another, and I did the same for the other four stem types we had identified in the collection. At first, this

task was helpful and we were able to narrow down some of the points to specific types. Eventually, however, we realized that the probability of narrowing each point to a specific type was so small it was no longer worth the effort. I stopped working on the point type spreadsheet and was resigned to sorting the points solely by stem type.

Although I did not end up using the point guides in the manner in which I originally intended, reading them ended up being useful when it came to giving the points more specific



**Figure 6-** This point from the IWU collection is an example of a stemless point.

Photo by Kate Scott



**Figure 7-** These points from the IWU collection are examples of notched points. From left to right: Side-notched and corner-notched.

Photo by Kate Scott

descriptions in the database I created. The database ultimately provided a useful visual aide for organizing the numerous stem and notch types, and has made identifying and describing the points much easier.

Once the collection had been sorted into stemmed, corner-notched, side-notched, and stemless, Dr. Wiant and I began to assign a number to each point. Numbers assigned to objects are usually referred to as accession, catalog or object numbers. Giving an accession number to each projectile point is a crucial step in the cataloging process. According to Collections Research News, “Those little numbers are the key to connecting the object to its documentation—the description, the source, the location and the condition of the object. They can also connect the physical object to a photograph...all of which can be of vital importance should the object turn up missing one day” (1). Without an accession number, there is no way to connect an object to the descriptive information associated with it and the object is worthless to a museum or archives. While the object is important, the information associated with the object is even more important because it helps tell the story of the object. In order to give this collection meaning, I assigned new accession numbers to each point and created my own database with descriptions of each point. By doing this, the IWU collection is more accessible to those who want to use the projectile points in the future.

Though time consuming, assigning accession numbers to each projectile point, was a relatively easy task. The IWU archives and special collections already had a set method for numbering the objects that are added to the collection. Burcaw (1983) notes, “Many museums today favor the system recommended by the AAM....It is simply to assign a number for the year, a number for the accession within that year, and a number for the object within the accession” (85). This is the system that the IWU archives uses. First an S or an A is used to designate if the objects are stored in the archives or the special collections. The projectile point collection is housed in the special collections room so we used an “S”. The second part of the number is the year that the collection was acquired by the archives. In the case of the projectile point collection, that year is 2007. Although it is speculated that the collection came to Illinois Wesleyan in the 1960’s or 1970’s, the collection was not officially accessioned into the archives until 2007. The year of accession is followed by a dash and then a number denoting the order that certain collections were acquired during that year. For instance, the projectile point collection was the seventh collection the archives acquired in 2007, so its collection number would be seven. That number is followed by another dash and then the number of the object within the collection is noted. Therefore, the complete number for the first object in the projectile

point collection is S2007-7-1 (M. Miner, personal communication, September 25, 2012). Dr. Wiant and I could have made these numbers more detailed by assigning certain numbers to each of the stem types we identified, numbering each point based on stem type, and then giving them an object number within the stem type categories. In the end, we decided that since hardly any information on the collection exists, it is better to assign each projectile point a single object number and provide detailed descriptions of the stem type in the database. If the points had been from the Midwest and we were able to better identify the material types, time periods, or point types, we could have used a combination of these to give the projectile points even more detailed numbers. Unfortunately, that information is not known at this time.

Dr. Wiant generously provided collection bags that can be written on and we started assigning accession numbers to the projectile points. I created a spreadsheet in Excel with columns for the accession number, material type, method of manufacture, weight, length, width, thickness, location, age, class, original artifact number, type of artifact, description, function and authenticity. We went through the collection point by point. For each point, we first assigned a number to it and wrote the number on the bag. Then we attempted to describe the point based on the categories in the spreadsheet. At first, Dr. Wiant described each of the points to me and explained his reasoning behind each description as we went so I could learn how to describe the points myself. When it came to the description column, we noted whether the point was stemless or stemmed. For those points that had an intact stem, I tried to be as specific as possible in my description, saying whether the point had an expanding, contracting, or straight stem, or if it was corner or side-notched (see Figure 8). After months of working with Dr. Wiant, I finally felt skilled enough to number the points and describe them on my own.



**Figure 8-** These points from the IWU collection show the different stem types Dr. Wiant and I sorted the collection by. From left to right: stemmed, expanding, contracting, and straight.

Photo by Kate Scott

Once all of the points had been put in a bag with an accession number and had been described in the database, the next step was to attach accession numbers to the points themselves, a crucial step in the cataloging process. Having the accession number on the bags alone is not enough. If some of the projectile points were ever to get separated from their bag, it might be possible to put them back based on the description provided in the database. Having



the accession number on the points themselves would make this problem easier to rectify if it were ever to occur.

The next decision was what method to use to attach the numbers. At first I thought I would write the numbers directly on the points using special pens for artifact numbering. After further thought, I decided this would be a bad method for several reasons. First, it would be hard to remove the numbers later if need be. As Braun (2007) explains, “Whenever possible, these numbers should be securely attached to the artifact but not impossible to completely remove later if that becomes necessary” (92). If the projectile points were to get separated from the database I created or if more information was discovered about the collection later and the numbering system had to be redone, then it would be best if the numbers could be removed. Another reason I chose not to write the numbers directly on the points was that a handful of points already had numbers written on them and I did not want the new accession numbers to get confused with the old ones. In addition, I was worried my handwriting would be too large and messy, thus taking away from the aesthetic value of the projectile points if I wrote directly on them. After sharing my dilemma with another anthropology student, Sarah Carlson, she told me about the numbering method she was taught during her internship at The Field Museum in Chicago last summer. After hearing her explanation of the method she used and reading the article on this method by Braun, I knew it was the perfect method to use on the projectile points.

The labeling method I chose requires the accession numbers to be typed and printed out. Since some of the projectile points have old accession numbers handwritten on them, typing the labels ensures that the accession numbers I assign do not get confused with the old ones. Braun (2007) details the appropriate font style and size to use. I tested several combinations, but ultimately found that Lucida Console font in size four was the best fit for the projectile points. Lucida Console is recommended as a font because it makes a better distinction between “L’s” and “1’s” than other font styles (Braun 2007). After they are printed out, the numbers are carefully cut out with an exacto knife. Next, a small layer of the clear chemical mixture of B-72 in acetone is applied to the least worked side of the projectile point. Typically, the most worked side is the one shown when a projectile point is displayed, so this way the number is not seen when the points are displayed, to avoid spoiling the object’s aesthetic. Then a fine paint brush or toothpick is used to press the number down as hard as possible so that all of the edges stick. Finally, a top coat of B-72 in acetone goes on top to seal the number. The point is set aside to dry, and ten minutes later is scratch tested to make sure all of the edges of the number are secure (Braun 2007). This same process was done for each of the projectile

points in the IWU collection. While this method is clearly more tedious than writing the number directly, it has many advantages. Even though the B-72 method takes a few more steps than handwriting the numbers, the typed numbers ended up being much more legible than if I had tried to write the numbers by hand. It also allowed the numbers to be a much smaller mark on the points.

While the typed numbers are obvious, I could never have handwritten the numbers as small as I typed them. Also, since I already made the spreadsheet in Excel, all I had to do was copy and paste the numbers into a Word document, change the style and size of the font, and print them, which made this method even easier to accomplish.

Another advantage, Braun (2007) points out, is that “the same labels can be used for both light and dark colored artifacts, eliminating the need in hand-numbering to have both black and white inks” (95). While the majority of the projectile points in the collection are made from a yellow brown chert, there are quite a few points made out of a darker chert. Using the typed labels instead of two different colors of ink also allows the points in the collection to look more uniform. In addition, the typed labels can be removed very easily with a few dabs of acetone in case the numbers ever needed to be corrected or changed.

Once all of the projectile points had accession numbers applied to them, I started photographing the collection. I went to Dickson Mounds and used a special program that allowed me to see what the photograph would look like on my computer before I took the photo (see Figure 9). I had originally hoped to send the photographs and spreadsheet out to projectile point experts in other regions of the United States to see if they could provide more details on the points in the collection that I could add to the spreadsheet of information. Unfortunately, time constraints made it impossible to accomplish this last step.



**Figure 9-** Each point was photographed on a black felt background from above. The numbered bag to more easily identify the points and a scale to give the viewer a general idea of the size of each point were also included in each photo.

Photo by Kate Scott

### Other Museums as a Source of Inspiration

Through my display I hoped to raise awareness about the valuable scientific information that is lost when amateur collectors do not record detailed information about their discoveries. Pearce (1990) states, “An important part of our role is to act as a bridge between people in general and the professional archaeological community” (2). Exhibits about archaeology are another tool to

fill the void that the literature has left between the general public and professional archaeologists. Archaeological exhibits help communicate the importance and role of archaeology in recovering pieces of the past and telling their stories. Archaeologists want to excite the general public about what they do and the things they have uncovered, as well as challenge the public to think critically about where the objects came from and the deeper historical significance they possess. I decided this would be a major component of my display.

Throughout my time at Illinois Wesleyan University, I was exposed to exhibit development through the Museum Studies May term and through a curatorial internship at McLean County Museum of History. Creating a display about the projectile point collection provided me with the opportunity to have more experience with exhibit development and to apply some of the skills I had already acquired.

The first display I helped create was in the May term Museum Studies class offered at Illinois Wesleyan. My partner and I chose to work with a collection of African drums owned by Dr. Rebecca Gearhart, an IWU Anthropology professor. We selected the objects first, interviewed Dr. Gearhart about the collection, and then focused the message for our exhibit of the drums. Since this is the way I first learned to create an exhibit, I thought this was the way all exhibits were produced. Lewis (1976) notes, however, that “Typically you would decide on what the exhibit will communicate before you select the object” (120). I learned about the type of exhibit development Lewis describes in my internship at McLean County Museum of History. First we developed the exhibit text, the message that we wanted to convey, and then we found the objects to help us illustrate our message. In the exhibits at McLean County Museum of History, it is the story of the people and their past that is important, the objects are simply tools to help tell that story and grab the public’s interest. If there had been enough information on the projectile points in the IWU collection, this is how I would have approached my display. In this case, however, I had to start with the objects and work backwards to decide what my message would be.

To help me determine what I wanted to communicate about the projectile points and how I would present the IWU collection to the public, I visited Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, the National Museum of the American Indian, Dickson Mounds State Museum and Mastodon State Historic Site in Imperial, Missouri to get ideas for my display. Pearce (1990) explains, “Most archaeological exhibitions are dynamic in concept, viewing history as a linear process in which one set of circumstances gives rise to the next, creating a sequence which moves human societies chronologically forward, leaving their pasts behind them” (159). I also spoke with

museum professionals Dr. Wiant (December 4, 2012) and Mr. Iseminger (October 19, 2012), who told me that the most common way to display projectile points is by the time period in which they were created. However, since time period was not something that could be easily inferred from the projectile points in the IWU collection, displaying them by time period was something I had to quickly dismiss. The amount of information I had about the collection started to limit the way I could tell the story of the projectile points.

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site was the first museum I visited. Mr. Iseminger told me that the points at Cahokia Mounds are displayed by time period (W. Iseminger, personal communication, October 19, 2012). There is a large panel next to the case that briefly explains the lifestyle of the people during each time period and the stone tool technology. The projectile points themselves are displayed in a large glass case that can be looked into from two sides and from above (see Figure 10). The points from the Archaic period are laid out on sand, the Early Woodland artifacts are on red gravel, the Middle Woodland artifacts are on mulch, and the Late Woodland artifacts are on the plain bottom case.

As I looked at Cahokia's display of projectile points, there were many aspects that I admired and there were some that I did not. I liked that Cahokia displayed a large variety of different sizes of projectile points. This made for an impressive and visually interesting display that caught the eye of the visitors. People coming into the exhibit were immediately drawn to the case because of the wealth of objects it contained. There was not that much information on the labels inside the case, which I was disappointed by, but at the same time I thought there were too many labels, making the case look a bit too crowded. The display was still visually interesting because of the use of different materials as backdrops for each time period and there were several platforms that created several levels of artifacts to look at. Despite these platforms, however, the visitor could only really see the one side of the points because they were lying flat on the platforms or the bottom of the case. It was almost impossible to see the side of the projectile points where they had been worked. Overall though, I admired



**Figure 10-** Projectile point display at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site. The projectile points are arranged by time period. In order to distinguish the points from the different time periods Cahokia Mounds used different materials as backdrops for the points.

Photo by Kate Scott

the way Cahokia Mounds displayed the projectile points in their collection, and I drew inspiration from this display for my own in The Ames Library.

The second museum I visited was Mastodon State Historic Site. This museum displays their projectile points in a way that differed greatly from Cahokia Mounds. Instead of a large



**Figure 11-** This display at Mastodon State Historic Park is very minimalist compared to the display at Cahokia Mounds. The points in this case are a type known as Clovis.

Photo by Kate Scott

case with a wide variety of points from different time periods in different sizes and colors, Mastodon took a rather minimalist approach. They had several cases covering different aspects of projectile points, such as how they were used in hunting, and how they were constructed, and they showed typical point types from each time period. One of the cases contained three pedestals at different heights and each pedestal had one projectile point on it (see Figure 11). You could see the case from all four sides so the text was printed on the sides of the pedestals. The text in each of the cases provided adequate

historical context for the points and gave the visitor an idea of how they were used, but it was not overly extensive. At first, I liked that there were not many points in the case, but after seeing the display at Cahokia Mounds as well as the one at the National Museum of the American Indian, I decided that it is hard to appreciate the different designs and technological advancements of projectile points if there are only a handful in the case. One aspect of the Mastodon exhibit that I found effective was a picture of a point that had all the different parts labeled for the visitor. I thought this added to the visitor's understanding of the technical terms that accompany projectile points.

I also visited the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, D.C. As Berry (2006) states, "The museum is home to one of the world's premier collections of Native American artifacts, and its galleries showcase objects of extraordinary significance and artistry" (67). Due to NMAI's reputation, I envisioned that the NMAI would have several displays of projectile points that told a rich story about the people who made and used them. I was surprised to discover, however, that there is only one display of projectile points in the entire museum and it hardly has any text. According to Isaac (2006),

In particular, a window case on arrowheads became the focal point of our conversation. This display consisted of a dramatic and beautiful arrangement of lithics, where a multitude of arrowheads were oriented in such a way as to make a swirling pattern that moved like a river, eddying, floating, and sweeping across a neutral background. There was no information in this case on the tools, no cultural or geographical regions of origin listed, and no accompanying dates indicating when they were made (582-83).

Reading Issac's critique and learning there was little written information about the projectile points, I prepared myself to instantly dislike the display. I was convinced the projectile point display was more artistic than informative, and this disappointed me. I thought that out of all the museums in the country, the one that would take the most care in emphasizing the importance of projectile points would be the NMAI.

While I found the lack of text in the exhibit off-putting, I found the display to be visually interesting; it definitely draws the visitor's attention (see Figure 12). While I was there, one boy saw the display from across the room and came running over to take a closer look. While there is not a lot of text, at second look, there is just enough to give the visitor context for the display. The NAMI display blends an artistic presentation with a scientific one. There is also an interactive screen that allows the visitor to click on certain clusters of points in the display for information about what type of point they are, the region of the United States in which they are found, and the time period in which they were created and used. This interactive tool was a nice touch because it provided viewers with the opportunity to learn more about the projectile points if they wanted to and it kept the display from being overcrowded with text. The nice thing about the wall display was that the visitor was able to see the sides of the points because they were not sitting flat on a pedestal or on the bottom of a case.

The last museum I visited on my exploratory mission was Dickson Mounds State Museum. Dickson Mounds has taken a completely different approach in one of their projectile point displays. Instead of arranging the projectile points by point type, material type or time period, this particular projectile point display at Dickson Mounds focuses on the projectile point collection of John William Cooper. The exhibit chronicles the scientific value of private



**Figure 12-** One of the three wall panels showing off the projectile point collection at the NMAI. Below these wall panels there were drawers filled with more points that visitors could open up and view.

Photo by Kate Scott



collections of projectile points such as the Cooper collection, as well as the proper methods for collecting points (see Figure 13).

In addition to visiting these four museums to get inspiration for my own display, I read books on creating exhibits. Pearce's book, *Archaeological Curatorship* (1990), gave me insight into how I could incorporate aspects of archaeology into my display. Pearce says, "a successful archaeology display has to be one which, like a good television programme or book, keeps the visitor attracted until the show is finished" (163). Pearce forced me to think about not only how I would talk about archaeology in my display, but also how I was going to engage the viewer.

Another dilemma I had to solve was how many projectile points to display. With over one thousand points in the IWU collection it was impossible to show them all, but I still wanted to display as many of the points as I could. Falk and Dierking (2000) note, "An exhibit case with a total hodgepodge of objects with no obvious visual or informational relationship is unsettling. It will appear haphazard and chaotic to the visitor, while a display with row after row of seemingly identical objects, neatly laid out without variation, has a mind-numbing effect" (126). It would not be fair to call the IWU collection of projectile points a hodgepodge since inferences can be made about the collection, which will be explained in detail below. I did worry about the display being boring since many of the projectile points look similar. Falk and Dierking forced me to think critically about how I would arrange the projectile points in the cases so the display would be visually interesting and not just row after row of projectile points.

The last major component of my display was the text. Lewis (1976) provided me with great advice when it came to writing labels and other text for my display. For Lewis, the role of text and photographs "is to bridge the communication gap between the voiceless specimen and the visitor" (121). Serrell (1996) adds that "all labels should be kept as brief as possible" (31). These two pieces of advice presented a challenge for me. Writing things in an interesting yet concise manner is something I have never done well, so writing text for a display was a huge challenge for me.



**Figure 13-** The projectile point display at Dickson Mounds influenced my display in The Ames Library the most. This display inspired me to focus my display on the collecting aspect of projectile points as well.

Photo by Kate Scott

After visiting a few museums and reading selections from the museum literature, I finally began to develop a plan for my own display. The first things I had to consider when planning out my display were the style of cases I would be using and the amount of space I would have. Since I did not know for sure which time periods the points were from, displaying them based on time period like Cahokia Mounds was not an option. While I liked the simplicity of the projectile point displays at NMAI and Mastodon, since this display was part of my research honors project, I felt I needed to provide more written information than those displays. Unfortunately, since I was unable to find out very much about the projectile point collection, I did not have the typical information that would be told about projectile points in a museum display. I did, however, have a different type of story to tell about the IWU collection. After much discussion, Dr. Gearhart, my project supervisor, suggested that I fashion the display after this paper. I realized that while the IWU collection did not yield much information on the projectile points themselves, there was still an important message that could be told using the points in the IWU collection. A main point throughout my paper is the problem with “casual” collectors taking projectile points without recording important information about them. One of the reasons “curious” collectors might not record the proper information is because they are uninformed about projectile points and so they do not know any better. I figured my display would be the perfect place to address this issue.

### Display of IWU Collection

After talking with Ms. Miner, I decided to use three of the standing glass display cases in the library for my display. The first case is divided into three small sections. The first section of the case introduces the viewer to the IWU projectile point collection by providing information about where and how it was discovered. The middle section provides an introduction to projectile points and briefly addresses the different sizes of points: arrow, dart, spear, and knife points, the different stem shapes present in the IWU collection, and the different parts of a projectile point. The third section of the case discusses what can be inferred from projectile points in order to give the viewer an idea of the scientific value of projectile points (see Figure 14).





**Figure 14-** The first case of the display in The Ames Library showed how the projectile points were found: wrapped in newspaper in boxes that were falling apart. It also showed examples of the different sizes of projectile points as well as the different stem types.

Photo by Kate Scott

The second case focuses on the differences between private collections of projectile points versus those found in museums and archives. It outlines the steps professional archaeologists take to catalog a collection of projectile points as well as the resources available to amateur collectors that wish to learn more about their private collections (see Figure 15).



**Figure 15-** In order to demonstrate the steps that professional archaeologists take to catalog projectile points I showed artifact bags, the tools I used to number each point, examples of database entries with the points they are describing as well as one of the photos of a point from the collection.

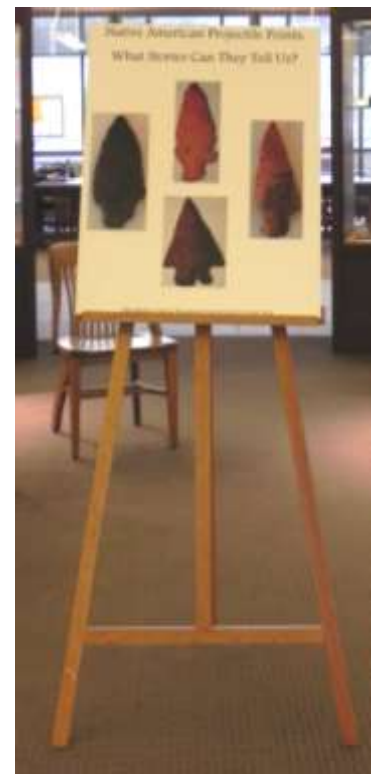
Photo by Kate Scott

The third and final case of the display highlights what I was able to discover about the IWU projectile point collection, the particular challenges I faced, and future possibilities for this collection. I combined several of the methods I witnessed at other museums in order to create this display. I took an artistic approach to mimic what I saw at NMAI because it drew viewers in. I chose to include more text than the NMAI exhibit, however (see Figure 16). I opted to use different backdrops such as sand to make some of the projectile points stand out. I also put a colored fabric on the bottom of each of the cases that complements both the light and dark colored points. In addition, I enlisted the help of my brother-in-law, Steve Sebastian, who owns a woodworking business, to build pedestals and the other wood display pieces, including the title board (see Figure 17).



**Figure 16-** The third case shows a copy of *The ARGUS* article focused on the John Krupp collection. I also chose to display some of the different material types that are present in the IWU collection on sand to better set the points off. My brother-in-law built the circular wooden piece, where I displayed a variety of dart points from the IWU collection.

Photo by Kate Scott



**Figure 17-** I chose to create a large title board with photos of points from the IWU collection for the display in order to catch peoples' attention as they walked in the library doors.

Photo by Kate Scott

In addition to the display, Isaac (2006) advises, "... an exhibit should have an accompanying publication in order to show in-depth research and how this contributed to the discipline" (581). Therefore, I decided to include a copy of my paper next to the cases with color-coded tabs. I put small labels inside the cases directing the viewer to the binder with my paper and told them which colored tab to turn to if they wished to read more about a certain topic. That way, the cases were not too crowded with text, yet more interested parties could read further if they wished.

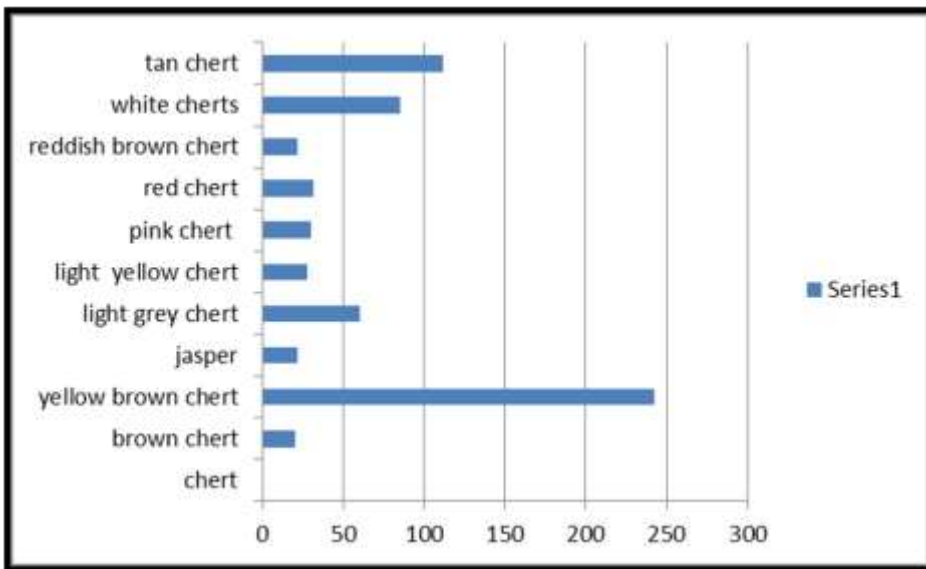
I also thought about how the literature on presenting archaeology to the public (see Chan) discussed the importance of getting the reader to make connections to the exhibit and to encourage them to ask questions. So, I decided to add a community engagement component to my display. I brainstormed with Dr. Gearhart and we came up with idea of having a bulletin board and slips of paper so people could share their own experiences with projectile points. I hoped that by giving people a chance to reflect and share their stories, the importance of my message about the scientific information projectile points can yield would better resonate with viewers.

### Conclusion

When I set out to study the IWU projectile point collection, one of the main questions I had hoped to answer was: where did this collection come from? I had the ambitious notion that I would be able to give a definitive answer of who the collection used to belong to, where the projectile points were collected, and how it came to IWU. The articles from *The ARGUS*, *The Pantagraph* and the *Wesleyana* suggest the projectile points I worked with are in fact part of the John Krupp artifact collection. There is still a chance, however, that it is a separate collection that IWU acquired in 1975, and therefore nothing conclusive about the provenance of the collection can be said at this moment. This creates an opportunity for further research in the future.

The second overarching question I ambitiously hoped to answer about the projectile points in the IWU collection was: what could be inferred about them? I wanted to know how they were used, which people most likely made them, and any other information I could discern. I learned during my project how attributes of projectile points may relate information about raw material, method of manufacture, use, repair and rejuvenation as another tool, and eventual discard: all of which may be observed. Sorting the points by stem shape allowed me and Dr. Wiant to make several inferences about the IWU collection. Though it was sorted at a general

level, the collection has been organized in a way that one can gain insight into how it relates to Native American cultural development. Now that some structure has been given to the collection, it is possible for other scholars to begin to infer if the collector was focused on a particular time period or a particular Native American culture. Creating a basic database for the collection allowed me to make inferences based on material type (see Figures 18 & 19), point function (see Figure 20) and stem shape (see Figure 21).



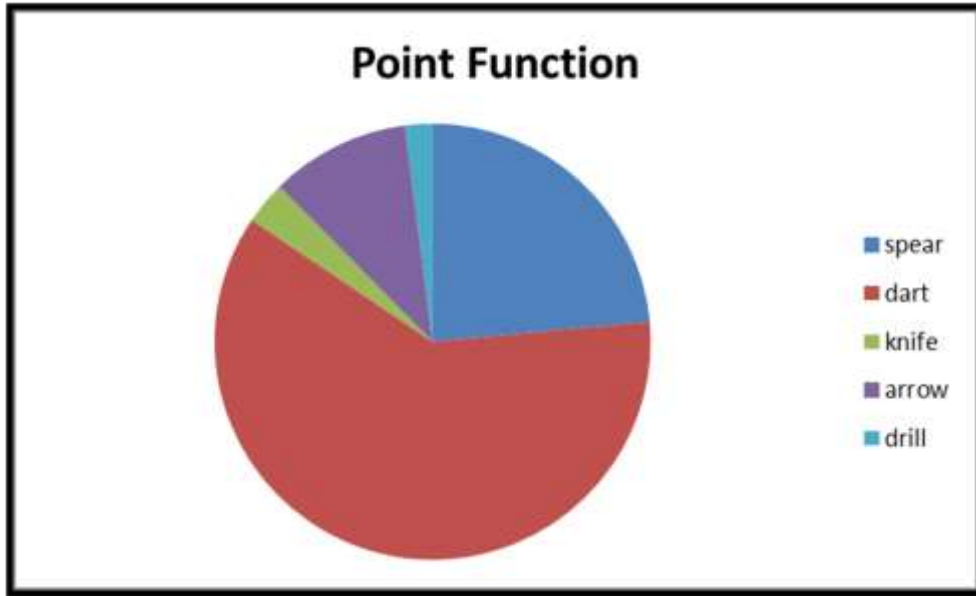
**Figure 18-** Most of the points in the IWU collection were made from yellow/brown chert. Certain kinds of rock are only available in specific areas of the United States. The use of yellow/brown chert suggests that many of the points are from the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Graph by Kate Scott



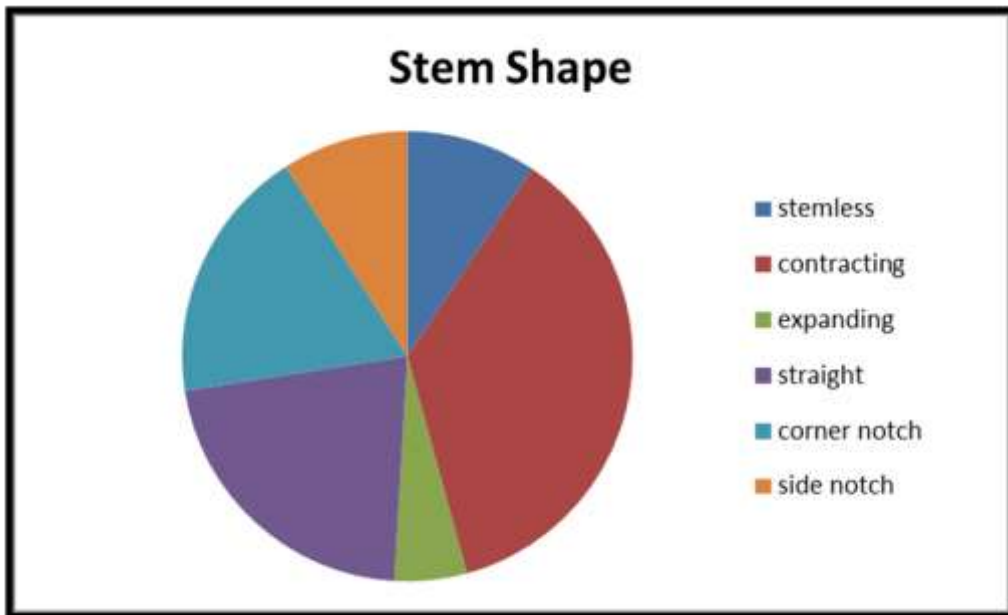
**Figure 19-** This point from the IWU collection is made of yellow/brown chert.

Photo by Kate Scott



**Figure 20-** There are relatively few spear points (dating to 8,000 to 10,000 years ago) or arrow points (dating to circa 1500 years and younger) in the collection. The majority is comprised of dart points, suggesting most of the points are from the Middle to Late Archaic (6,000 to 3,000 years ago) and/or Early to Middle Woodland (3,000 to 1,200 years ago) time periods.

Graph by Kate Scott



**Figure 21-** The majority of the points in the IWU collection have contracting stems, also suggesting that the points date to the Late Archaic or Early Woodland time periods.

Graph by Kate Scott

While the IWU collection did yield some information, it was not as much as I had hoped. Nonetheless, working with the collection still had its benefits. I personally benefited a great deal from working with this collection. I gained valuable research, collections, and exhibit skills and experience, all of which will help me achieve my future goal of working in a museum. Before I started working with this collection, no information was known about it. Now that the collection has been given accession numbers, and a spreadsheet has been created to catalogue it, it is officially part of IWU Special Collections and can be utilized by other students or faculty in the future.

At the beginning of my research I was unsure of how useful the collection was to IWU. Through my research, I have learned that the majority of the projectile points are suspected to be from the Lower Mississippi River Valley. As I recently observed a collection of points made of yellow/brown chert that were found in the Mississippi archaeological record, I am more certain that this assumption is correct. In the future, researching Mississippi archaeology and point types may provide further insight into the IWU collection.

The opportunities for further developing the IWU collection are vast. Photographs of the majority of the collection need to be taken and measurements of the length, width, height and thickness of each projectile point would add important information to the database I started. In order to have a thorough record of each point, it is important that this information be gathered. This task would be good project for IWU archaeology students. Students might measure each of the points for statistical analysis of the point sizes present in the collection. This collection could be used by students in Museum Studies courses as an option for an exhibit project. Such a display might focus on the problems of undocumented collections or about the typology of projectile points. The article in *The Pantagraph* might also be researched further. *The Pantagraph* may have other photos of the Krupp collection in their archives that could help determine if the points I worked with are in fact part of the Krupp collection.

Once more information on the collection is gathered, it could be introduced to the larger, internet-connected society. The ultimate goal for any collection is to increase its audience. Though I photographed some of the points, I never had the opportunity to send the photographs and spreadsheet out to projectile point experts. I had hoped to post the photographs along with the spreadsheet on the internet so that others could look at the collection and leave comments if they had further information about points in the collection. By extending the collection to others in the archaeological community, I had hoped to gain more insight into the IWU collection. Perhaps scholars interested in Native American peoples of Mississippi and/or the Southern

Plains would find the IWU collection useful if they had access to it. If a future student were to continue my work on this collection, this is a task they should definitely strive to achieve. If additional information could be gained about this collection, then perhaps it would become useful to the University in more ways. For now, the IWU projectile point collection provides an insightful lesson on the issues and challenges associated with collecting projectile points.

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