

Joan Kjaer: Hello and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. I'm Joan Kjaer and we're coming to you from MERGE in downtown Iowa City. Our topic tonight is Against Amnesia: Archives, Evidence and Social Justice and we're kicking off the activities related to this year's Provost's Global Forum of the same name, which will take place on the UI campus March 1st through the 3rd. Don't forget that you're invited to attend any of the forum activities and you can find out where and when they take place at archivesagainstamnesia.com. The word "archive" can cover an endless array of collections of one sort or another. They might include books, photographs, public records, physical objects and much more as we'll learn in this segment, and the archive itself can be found online, in a school library, at a state historical society, in a private collection or maybe held in a museum or at the office of the state archeologist.

Our guests in this segment have used and overseen such archives and have joined us to consider some of the ethical challenges related to archives. Just next to me is John Doershuk, the state archeologist of Iowa. Good to have you here, John.

John Doershuk: Hi to you all.

Joan Kjaer: Next to him is Jacki Rand, an associate professor in the University of Iowa Department of History. Thanks for being here, Jacki.

Jacki Rand: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: At the far end, we have Trina Roberts who's the director of the University of Iowa Pentacrest Museums. Thanks, Trina. I'm looking forward to this discussion very much, the notion of ethical challenges, what we keep, what we don't keep, how we show it, who tells us the story? John, I'd like to start with you. As the state archeologist of Iowa, we might assume that your office would house lots of documents, maybe some physical reminders of people who were here long before ourselves, but your office is responsible for other things as well, including archiving human remains.

John Doershuk: That's correct.

Joan Kjaer: Tell us what the Office of State Archeologist does?

John Doershuk: Yeah. The Office of the State Archeologist at the University of Iowa, or OSA as we refer to it, has been operating as a research center on campus since 1959, and it was established in a state code, which is why it's the Office of State Archeologist, but it was intentionally positioned at the university so it could function as a public-facing aspect of the state. We're sort of a hybrid, the State Hygienic Lab is on a similar model where there's lots of things that are done statewide that are research oriented and appropriately at the university rather than housed within a governmental unit over at Des Moines.

The OSA has a variety of responsibilities, one of which is the protection of ancient human remains, which in some cases includes actually housing them in our facility for a period of time, but we do a lot of research around the state conducting actual archeological fieldwork and that feeds into the infrastructure development and compliance process that's driven by various federal laws. But a major thing that we do for the state is serve as the state archeological repository and that is an archive, focused on artifacts. Artifacts and archeology includes tools and bits of pottery and animal bone and all the things that people in the past utilized as material technology that is preserved to the present day. Associated records with those artifacts are myriad, and include many of the things that you mentioned. Photographs, either of artifacts or places that they came from, correspondence about archeological discoveries and archeological research, maps, of course, are critically important. Location is everything in archeology as in real estate-- and then also, of course, reports of all sizes, shapes and facts.

Joan Kjaer: How long have you been there at the office?

John Doershuk: I've been the state archeologist now for almost 11 years with the office since 1995 and various other functions, and I should point out, the scale of the collections I guess would be something that people probably aren't aware of. We have collections from approximately 10,000 archeological sites across the state. About half of those are no longer extant. That is they've been destroyed by some kind of development action, so the records that we have are the only physical evidence of those things that remain. Those artifacts total about four million in quantity, so it's a lot of material and then we have about 300,000 records in the digital archive. About 90% of those are electronic. The other 10% are still paper photographs, but I would like to loop back to something that we talked about in the first segment. We keep a preservation copy of everything. We're pack rats in that sense and don't let that original go.

A good example of that are the site record forms that we keep. Those used to be done all by hand and we still have those handwritten copies. Even though they've been transcribed and digitized in various forms, sometimes you have to go back to those original records. To get just the new ones, even though something is written, sometimes it gives you a little hint about something.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Who accesses these archives?

John Doershuk: Yeah. Many of the people that come in don't come in anymore because of the digital access that's possible, but the primary users are professional archeological consultants around the state who have businesses that support the compliance process that's involved with doing the research necessary to make good decisions about where sustainable development should happen or not happen, but we also have researchers of all stripes, public and academic, that come and use our materials as well for specific projects. We have one individual from Northeast Iowa that's been researching rock art, so he's been

using our resources very heavily as well as contributing to them. Over at Iowa State, there's an archeologist that frequently borrows animal bone collections from our repository for his comparative research and on and on. Just all sorts of users in it.

Joan Kjaer: We had a conversation before the program where you talked about some of the ethical challenges related to collections like yours. Let's run through some of those.

John Doershuk: Sure. Yeah. Yeah. I think when we were discussing what could be an ethical challenge, what comes to mind is who controls the past? Who decides what kind of information is kept in an archive? On a day to day basis, that can be challenging. Is this scrap of paper that has a written note on it worth keeping? Do you keep everything? It's not possible we keep everything. There's always a winnowing process, a process of deciding what goes in and what doesn't go in, and history can judge us for that, but archives are shaped by the decision makers who say, "Yes, this is part of this archive now." That gives any particular archive a flavor, if you will, and shapes then how it can be used. That initial decision about what to research and what to keep about that research is important, but then there's an access issue as well. Who gets to use what's in the archive?

In the archeological world, there's a major constraint that we place on access, which has to do with professional qualification and we use that idea of someone who's a professional, someone who was committed to the ethics of the discipline in terms of preservation, stewardship of the past, learning from the past as opposed to say, monetizing it to sell artifacts on the art market or something like that. That distinction is very critical. We don't let just anybody come in and see the maps of where the archeological sites are, for example, because they are non-renewable resources. If someone goes out and destroys an archeological deposit looking for artifacts that have sale quality, then they're gone. There's no one making those things anymore. Access control is something that is a critical aspect as well.

Joan Kjaer: Periodically, we'll hear about something that's discovered on farmland or there's a site somewhere where a particular bone turns up or something. What, during the time you've been there, are some of the more interesting items that have come into your office?

John Doershuk: Yeah. Well, there's lots of examples of that. Amongst some of the most ancient remains in Iowa are particular kind of projectile point, a spear point that's called the Clovis or Folsom, they're [inaudible 00:08:19] in a particular way, manufactured in a particular way. These are relatively rare around the state, so anytime that we become aware of one of these kinds of discoveries, it causes a stir archeologically as well as among the collectors who admire these kinds of objects. We've had a couple of instances where someone has called up literally and said, "I found this rock. Can you tell me about it?" I get those probably once

a week and most of them are just rocks and I refer them to the [inaudible 00:08:46].

Once in a while, I open a digital photograph and I go, "Wow. That is really spectacular." In one particular case, there was one of these very early projectile points found at north Sioux City and it was on public property, and unfortunately, the individual who picked it up should not have done so. He did not have permission and then it got sold and then it got sold again, and it ended up in the hands of a collector in Kentucky who was about to sell it overseas, and the federal agencies caught up with him and there are laws to prohibit this kind of trade. Here was this international case that came back to my desk that was very interesting to get involved with and sort out all the way back to this guy in Sioux City who had no idea what he had started.

Joan Kjaer: Sure. You had no idea that something had been picked up in Sioux City until it was almost going overseas?

John Doershuk: No. Not until ... Yeah. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:09:38].

Joan Kjaer: Oh, wow. Very interesting. Oh, yeah. Thank you. Well, let's just go down, John, to Jacki Rand here. Jacki, you have an appointment in the history department and you teach courses on American Indian and Native studies. You utilize lots of different archives and I imagine there are some things you're looking for that you simply can't find. Tell us a little bit about how you use archives and what are the most vexing problems you run into?

Jacki Rand: Yeah. Well right now, I'll talk about my book project, which started out as a book on violence against Native women and, for reasons I don't need to get into, I decided to focus on the Choctaw in Mississippi, and I spent a number of summers down there doing research. I wasn't entirely sure what I was doing except I just wanted to get to the local level to try to write about this thing that people are writing about at a very high level from pretty poor statistics at the Department of Justice. I got down there the first summer and I'm in Neshoba County, which is where their primary reservation is and I just happen to hear that the editor of a 150-year-old newspaper, well he wasn't the editor the whole time, but one of the editors of the newspaper was still alive.

I thought, "Well, he should be good for some stories." I went to his house. He and his wife, they gave me iced tea and we're just talking in the way that you do when you're down there, which I'm familiar with. He says, "What are you working on?" I told him, and he said, "Oh." He said, "I don't know anything about that here." I said, "Okay." We just kept talking and drinking iced tea and then he said, "But there was that one case." He sent me on a search and on the last day of my research summer, after looking for this trial transcript that involved the ... I'm sorry. I'm choking here. That involved the rape of a young girl and her death, a young Choctaw girl, and her death. The perpetrator was a local merchant guy, was amazingly tried and convicted. All of his Neshoba County

and Philadelphia County friends got together and got him a really good lawyer and they appealed to the state.

It's frequently the practice in the south. You appeal if there's ever a conviction of a person of color. It goes to the state and then it's overturned. I have learned from talking to a judge that there had to be a trial transcript and I spent the summer nagging the people at the State Historical Society and I'm just sort of beside myself, I said, "Really, it's got to be here." This goes back and forth and I ended up at the Supreme Court, a law library and this woman is telling me, "There is no such case," and I said "I know there is a case. I know it's here." Just in frustration, and this is what research is like sometimes, you're just following your nose and so I went into the library and I said, "What is that thing called The Southern Digest that that judge mentioned?" "I have no idea."

I go in, and I said, "Do you have something called The Southern Digest?" She points to this wall, this whole wall. I just go to the year after she died, and I pulled the book off the shelf and it's just the summaries of cases, not all cases. It's not exhaustive. Just some interesting cases and I took it to this table and I opened it up and it fell open to the case. I took it over to the library and I said, "Can I copy this?" She said, "Okay." Then, I ran back down to the Supreme Court clerk and I just held it up to the glass. She said, "Okay." She goes and she comes back and she says, "Meet me down the hallway." I go down this really long hall, there's one door at the end of it. I'm just thinking, "This is so strange." I go in. It's this big empty space with one elderly woman back there and she said, "Tell your tale to Mrs. So and So, and see if she can help you."

Well, it turns out she's the person who boxed things up and sent it over to the State Historical Society. She gets on the phone and she's like, "Could you wait just five minutes?" I said, "Sure." The phone rings and she starts scribbling and she hands me a piece of paper and she said, "Take this over to the reference desk at the Historical Society. This is your ..." I went over there at this point like they rolled their eyes when they see me, and I went up and I said, "It's here, and it's all this code from the back." She said, "Are you sure?" She said, "How did you get this?" I said, "It's a long story and it's 4:45 and I have to go back to Iowa." She went back there and she came out with this trial transcript.

Joan Kjaer: No kidding.

Jacki Rand: The whole trial transcript of this case of a 13-year-old girl. Now, if you can imagine, we've been talking a lot about populations of Iowa, not one mentioned up until this point is American Indians. They're so invisible even here even though they've been here all this time, and so you imagine a 13-year-old girl whose raped and died. It's amazing what we know about her life from this trial transcript, and all the various ways, then add some story and I kind of pull out all my toolkit and I start working on this. I said, "Well, I have to go back to Iowa. Can you copy this for me?" It was one of those weird-shaped sized paper, and she said, "Oh, it's going to cost you a little bit." I said, "Total it up." I wrote my

\$300 check to her and I gave her my address at the history department. This whole project has been like that because that's what it's like to try to find invisible people.

If I may say so, I know it sounds kind of cheeky, but it's really not that hard to write histories of famous white men. This kind of work is very challenging and you have to be willing to work with as little as [Miriam 00:17:15] suggested. Miriam's not finding a lot of material about these women, but she's going to be able to write a book because she's a very skilled person and she's going to come up with something. Then, these people would be less visible or be more visible to us. I think I've had these other kinds of experiences in the archive, but sometimes I don't even really know what I'm looking for.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Jacki Rand: I just don't really know. Then, I just keep looking and keep talking to people and keep bugging the librarians and archivists.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. I understand you're also involved in the Native Spaces project?

Jacki Rand: Yes. Well again, it's about trying to get some visibility for indigenous people here in State of Iowa and really in the Midwest, and it's about pushing back against institutions that ignore them, but it's also about pushing back against our understanding of Indian removal. I'm Choctaw. I was born with Indian removal in my DNA. I knew the story when I came in this world, but living here for 20 years made me go, "Well, this story is really actually a lot more complicated." The people as much as we try to erase them here, they're not really gone. I've met a lot of people that your office works with, and so this is about working with the Meskwaki right now, the Meskwaki and the Ioway and I'm getting ready to go meet with the [Hochank 00:18:56] people.

Then, we have someone coming from Oklahoma who's Shawnee. We have people who were removed from Iowa and returned. We have people who've been removed, but they still managed to stay in the area of their homeland, so that would be the [Hochank 00:19:14]. We have people who were totally removed, the Shawnee and have never made their way back, but they still have a lot of interest in the homeland culturally speaking. The more I do this, the more I understand all of this different stories about Indian removal, which is a ... Even today, even like a very respected scholar will write about Indian removal as if it only happened to the five tribes of the Southeast.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Yeah.

Jacki Rand: I'm really dug in to this Indian removal thing, but also to try to push back against the erasure of Native people in the state and in this region.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Great. Great. Trina, we'll come to you to hear about the University of Iowa Pentacrest Museums, which have an amazingly wide variety of really interesting stuff. Tell us a little bit about those museums.

Trina Roberts: Well, the Pentacrest Museums are the Museum of Natural History and also the Old Capitol Museum. Museum of Natural History is going to sound to many people like it has zoology collections and maybe botany collections. In our case, we do have zoology collections. We also have a really interesting cultural collection. The fact that we're called the Museum of Natural History doesn't mean that we only do things that are traditionally thought of as natural history. On our campus, the archeological collections are mostly held by John's group and the Office of the State Archeologist and the paleontology collections are mostly in yet another department in the paleontology repository. We have basically the zoology and the anthropology. Then, the Old Capitol Museum is a museum of Iowa history and has some really interesting archives of the building of the Old Capitol itself and some early history of Iowa City. Again, just a really interesting combination.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Of course, these museums go back a long way?

Trina Roberts: Right. The Museum of Natural History goes all the way back to 1858.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Trina Roberts: We are not a super-giant museum by natural history museum standards. We've got about 140,000 specimens and objects in our collections, but we have some really, really interesting archives of biodiversity in the Midwest in Iowa, not only in this region, but you may know that Iowa is the most changed state in the country in terms of land use. And if you're a scientist who's interested in doing something like looking at the birds of Iowa or the birds of the Midwest before modern agriculture, you're going to have to go to a natural history museum and do that. We've got that kind of archive.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. We've been talking a little bit about ethical considerations and collections. Do you think that ethical standards have changed during those 100 or more years in terms of the way things were collected, the way they were presented, the stories that were told within the museum to the people who came to visit?

Trina Roberts: Absolutely. Yes. Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Trina Roberts: The standards have changed a lot. There are ways that collections were acquired in the early years that we would not do now. There are kinds of objects that were acquired that we would not acquire now, and there are objects that we have sent back to their original owners, a process called repatriation because we've come to a new understanding of what kinds of objects should be

in museums and shouldn't be in museums, should be on display and shouldn't be on display, and who gets to make those determinations.

Joan Kjaer: May I ask you for an example of something that has been sent back to the original source?

Trina Roberts: Yeah. One recent example of that is the bear claw necklace that used to be on display in Iowa Hall in the Museum of Natural History and it's an amazing object from the Meskwaki here in Eastern Iowa. It was a centerpiece of our case that was about the Meskwaki that was put together in collaboration with them in the 1980s, but as they have grown to have a museum of their own, they realized that they wanted this really important cultural object to come back to them. It has meaning beyond just being an example of a bear claw necklace. It needs to be back with the other bear claw necklaces that it goes with. There's a long formal process about repatriation, but the end result of that is they now have the bear claw necklace.

Joan Kjaer: Sure. I imagine a request may come in from a group like ... We'll just use this example, from the Meskwaki requesting the piece. As you and your staff in the museum look at what you have, do you sometimes say, "Wow. We have got this. We need to take the step to reach out to the original or to another appropriate source for this object to be shown," or if it's owned by a certain something, just the repatriation. Do you sometimes initiate that on your own?

Trina Roberts: Yeah. The legal repatriation process is, in some ways, limited to United States artifacts, but we have repatriated some other artifacts to other places in the world because we came to that realization that it was not right for us to have them and display them. Most of that, we think, is now done although as we learn more about some of the objects particularly objects associated with funerals, ritual objects, that may happen again. We've worked with John's office frequently on making some of those determinations.

Joan Kjaer: Well, quick question. One of the things museum goers rely on is the descriptive card, the story of the object or the representation you're looking at. I've noticed in my lifetime how, when revisiting museums, those change overtime, there's a new understanding of how we think about a certain something. Do you constantly look at the way you're describing something for the member of the public coming in to rethink whether you're actually saying it in the most appropriate way?

Trina Roberts: We do, although we probably could do that more frequently and do a better job of it. One of the great things about being at the university museum is that we can draw on the expertise of the history department, the archeologist, and hopefully that helps us tell those stories in the right way, but it is a constant process trying to do this and do it well.

Joan Kjaer:

Wow. I'm so grateful to have you guys all here. John Doershuk, Jacki Rand and Trina Roberts. Really, really interesting. Thank you very much. I hope you can all stay with us for the third part of this program in just a moment. WorldCanvass, as you know, is from International Programs, and you can catch this podcast on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange and the International Programs website, which is international.uiowa.edu. Thank you very much and stay with us for the third segment.