



**Midwest
Archaeological
Conference, Inc.**

*a not-for-profit corporation
dedicated to archaeological
research, communication,
and preservation in the
Midwestern U.S.
and neighboring areas*

www.midwestarchaeology.org

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8 July 2011

Chancellor Meryll H. Tisch
New York State Board of Regents
Regents Office
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, N.Y. 12234

Dear Chancellor Tisch:

It is with greatest concern that the Board of the Midwest Archaeological Conference, Inc. (MAC) notes that the archaeology program at the New York State Museum (NYSM) will be hard hit by the recently announced layoffs of several Museum Scientists. For archaeology, these terminations include two Curators and the State Archaeologist, all with sterling reputations.

The layoffs are especially unfortunate because New York archaeologists, including those at the State Museum, have been a leading force in the development of the profession from the early twentieth century onward. That work has included significant scholarly contributions as well as an active involvement in public education through various outreach programs and museum exhibits. First-rate scholarly activity and widely appreciated public education are just the most visible aspects of what the NYSM will lose as a result of the planned layoffs. The NYSM is charged with maintaining and preserving major collections of artifacts (and accompanying documentation) of considerable significance to scholars. Many of these objects also have great museum exhibit value, hence are an important part of public education. The maintenance of archaeological site records is also a vital part of monitoring and preserving the state's cultural and historical heritage. All of the above, in turn, has a considerable economic impact through fostering tourism based on New York's rich historical heritage.

Layoffs of personnel with high levels of training, including advanced degrees and years of experience, will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the NYSM to carry out its state-mandated responsibilities to care for collections of irreplaceable artifacts and associated documentation, as well as conduct research and undertake various public education initiatives.¹ Without the necessary personnel – and the museum staff is already stretched thin by previous workplace reductions – the NYSM cannot meet its statutory obligations. The collections and accompanying documentation, for example, are frequently used by far more than professional archaeologists; other users include students, governmental agencies, and Native American tribes. No other public or private institution in New York combines such a high level of involvement with the state's rich prehistoric and historic-period past by maintaining a balance among collections and document management, public outreach, and scholarly research.

We are mindful that in times of budgetary crisis hard decisions have to be made. But whatever short-term benefit might be gained from cutting critical NYSM personnel, including several well-known archaeologists, it will be dwarfed by the irrevocable harm the layoffs will do to erode the museum's core missions (collections, research, and education) over the long term.

The MAC Board urges you to reconsider the planned layoffs so the NYSM can continue to serve as one of the premier state museums in the country.

Sincerely,



George R. Milner
MAC President

¹ Education Law § 233; www.nysm.nysed.gov/services/233/srv233law.html

Cc: Governor Andrew Cuomo
Dr. John B. King, Jr., Acting Commissioner of Education
Dr. Clifford A. Siegfried, Director, New York State Museum