

# Preface

In the fall of 2013, I was working in a historic carriage house in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston restoring shutters from an 1806 house. To keep sane during the tedious work, I had an NPR podcast playing on the radio when I heard an introduction to the next story, the release of a new book by the British Museum, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (MacGregor, 2011). It made me think that it would be great if someone wrote a history of Boston based on artifacts from Boston archaeological sites. Then I realized that as city archaeologist, that person should probably be me, so I immediately started brainstorming artifacts to include, and that evening I was Googling “how to write a book proposal.”

In December 2011, I became one of the luckiest living archaeologists when I was offered my dream job: the city archaeologist of Boston. I had grown up in Maine struggling to decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I knew what I didn't want: a job that I didn't love. I knew I loved science, but was more interested in the investigation and discovery aspects than the chemistry- or math-based sciences. I'm not sure what triggered the idea—maybe it was a TV show featuring an archaeological dig—but I started looking into archaeology as a career during my senior year of high school. The idea of being an archaeologist, making discoveries, and traveling made me more excited about my future life than anything else I was considering at the time.

A few very fortunate events followed. First, I was accepted into my first-choice college, Boston University (BU), which had its own undergraduate archaeology degree program. It may also have been the only university that accepted me, but it was a perfect fit, regardless. Soon after getting accepted into BU, it dawned on me that what I saw on TV and online may not be reality for most archaeologists, so I started trying to track down digs in my home state of Maine that I could participate in during the summer before I left for school, just in case I hated it.

The Maine State Museum offered a one-week field program in Down East Maine on the Goddard site, a multicomponent Native site practically made of artifacts. While it was no Egypt or Peru, digging on the coast of Maine feet from the ocean with a view of Acadia National Park was, in my opinion, just as good, and I completely fell in love with archaeology.

Words cannot describe how much I enjoyed studying archaeology at BU: I met my wife, Jen, who is also an archaeologist; I made a ton of friends I still have today; and I got to live in a specialty dorm for archaeology and classics majors. Just before my first summer at BU, I begged the state archaeologist of Maine to let me volunteer for his office during the summer to get experience. He said yes, for some reason, and I spent the summer creating a digital map of all of the archaeological sites and surveys in Maine. The next three summers I was invited back, but as a paid field technician for the small cultural resource management (CRM) firm based out of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). I showed up on my first day of CRM in western Maine at the age of eighteen wearing shorts and sandals, and I did not bring water. I have come a long way since then. I dug my first test pit (poorly), had to learn metric measurements, threw out a ton of clay tobacco pipe stems, thinking they were sticks (this was my first historic site), and shook my head as someone patiently attempted, without much success, to teach me the differences between creamware, pearlware, and whiteware. This crew did archaeological digs for development projects throughout the state, and I will be eternally grateful for the Maine crew's patience, encouragement, and near-constant stream of Monty Python and SNL skit quotes.

During my senior year at BU in 2006, I wrote a thesis on a Boston Native site (which includes artifacts 2 and 4 presented in this book). I was rejected from the only graduate program I applied to, frustratingly, but I found work as an intern at the Massachusetts Historic Commission working in their Technical Service Division, assisting their archaeological staff review development projects. The following year, my wife of one month and I moved to Florida, where I found out the hard way how difficult it was to find archaeology jobs during a recession. Eventually we were able to find such work, excavating and reburial of several sets of human remains, although it was in the Everglades and we were surrounded by fire ants, lightning, snakes, and alligators.

We fled back to Boston in 2008. Again, finding work in archaeology was nearly impossible, so I became a self-employed artist but continued to do independent archaeological study on various collections I had access to around Boston. I also continued a multiyear trend of not getting into graduate school. I did, however, eventually find employment with Public Archaeology Laboratory (PAL), a private nonprofit CRM firm, and had several truly incredible seasons with their amazing crew excavating and romping over sites and miles of power-line corridors throughout New England. In September 2010, I found out that Ellen Berkland, Boston's city archaeologist, was leaving her position to become the archaeologist for the state Department of Conservation and

Recreation (DCR). While I was planning on applying to the University of Massachusetts–Boston for its master’s program in historical archaeology, the application was not even due for months, and I knew I needed to be at least enrolled in a master’s program to be qualified for the job.

Unfortunately for the City Archaeology Program, but fortunately for me, the recession led to a job-hiring freeze for the city, and the position remained vacant for more than a year. During that time, I got into the UMass–Boston master’s program in historical archaeology, and I started doing public talks and writing as though I were the city archaeologist. I figured the job would open at some point, and if I could show I had been doing much of the stuff I would be doing as city archaeologist on my own time, it would give me an advantage. It did.

In November 2011, the position finally opened, and within a few weeks I was chosen. That was and will be one of the most surreal and happiest moments of my life. I have had the honor and pleasure of being the city archaeologist of Boston since that time, where I manage more than one million artifacts excavated from dozens of sites throughout the city, conduct digs on smaller projects on city-owned land, and provide public outreach and education events throughout the year.

I was extremely fortunate in 2013 to receive permission from my superiors in the city to pursue publication of this book and to write it as part of my work, so long as all of the author proceeds go toward the City Archaeology Program. Because the program relies exclusively on donated labor, funds, and supplies for its work, this book is a major part of our future funding plans for the City Archaeology Program. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have shown by reading this book, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

#### A NOTE ON THIS EDITION

As scientists, archaeologists hope and expect our data will be read, double-checked, questioned, and reinterpreted as new data, theories, and methods arise.

In 2017 a City of Boston Archaeology Program volunteer, Liz Quinlan, offered to put her training in zooarchaeology to use with animal bone material from Boston-area sites. The Three Cranes Tavern cat skeleton, which was recently published in this book and on exhibit in the lab, was our first stop.

Not too long after Liz started her examination of the skeleton, she approached me with a problem: she didn’t think it was a cat. Given that she

was far from the first person to look at the skeleton since it was excavated in 1985, and nobody had questioned its identification, I had my doubts, but Liz was quick to point out aspects of the teeth, skull, and a missing small hole (foramen) in its leg bone that, according to her research, positively excluded it from being a cat.

Setting aside my personal embarrassment for publishing incorrect data, I challenged Liz to create a definitive list of attributes that confirm her hypothesis, and, more importantly, to publish her results so that we can “correct” the record. In the years since, Liz has presented her findings in several research forums, including the International Council on Archaeozoology’s meeting of the Zooarchaeology of the Modern Era working group. At the time of this new edition, she is planning an extended study of its unusual skeletal features for publication. As the thesis of chapter 21 is ritual practice, and cats were much more thoroughly documented in connection with ritual practice than dogs, Liz’s reinterpretation initially challenged the entire point of that chapter. However, her research into the use of dogs in contexts like this has led her to draft an article on the cultural and ritual significance of the Three Cranes Tavern Dog.

When Brandeis University Press announced their plans to reissue 50 *Artifacts*, I was asked if there were any revisions we wanted to make. The “not-cat,” as we began to refer to it, was given a chance to have its true identity revealed, and Liz has graciously cowritten the revised chapter 21 based on her extensive reanalysis of the very-much-a-dog skeleton and its place in Boston history.

Archaeology is an evolving field. Each year, we learn new things about the past, we discover new ways to interpret our findings, and we use new technology to record them. And, sometimes, we realize we are wrong, we reanalyze, and we change our conclusions.