

An Interview with Mary Beth Reed and Joe Joseph

By Phillip Hodge, SEAC Newsletter Editor

Mary Beth Reed and Joe Joseph co-founded New South Associates in 1988. Based in Stone Mountain, Georgia, Mary Beth is New South's President and Director of History, while Joe serves as Director of Administration and Project Manager.



PH: I want to start with the [Veterans Curation Program \(VCP\)](#). Joe, I know you've been involved with the VCP. I don't know a lot about it, but it sounds like a really phenomenal idea. Tell me a little bit about it.

JWJ: The VCP is a really phenomenal idea – you've hit it on the head. It was created by Dr. Michael K. "Sonny" Trimble, Director of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mandatory Center of Expertise for the Curation and Management of Archaeological Collections at the St. Louis District. Sonny directed the excavation and recovery of mass graves during the Iraq war, during which he worked with U.S. Military personnel and came away from that experience with a deep appreciation of the military's efforts, as well as the physical and emotional strain of their assignments. He came back from Iraq feeling that we as a nation owed a tremendous debt to veterans, one that frankly wasn't being repaid. When President Obama was developing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Sonny came up with the idea of using stimulus funding to help the Corps fulfill its mission to rehabilitate old collections, while also helping the Vets by hiring and training them as lab technicians. The VCP was funded by ARRA with three labs established, one in St. Louis, MO; one in Alexandria, VA; and the one in Augusta, GA that New South Associates currently runs.

Veterans are hired to work as technicians for five to six month terms. They work in two different areas within the labs – artifacts and archives – rehabilitating and documenting old Corps collections and preparing them to current curation standards. They also create digital records so the collections can be returned to the curation facility and made accessible. The Vets also learn digital

photography because the Corps is developing a digital archive of photographs of diagnostic materials and scans of documents that will be made available on-line through the Digital Archaeological Record (tDAR). The VCP is the first program that I am aware of that is emphasizing the creation of digital collections, which will significantly help address issues with access to collections.

PH: What do the Veterans get out of the program?

JWJ: They get a number of things. First, almost all of them went into the military straight out of high school and have no sense of how a professional office works, what is and isn't appropriate office behavior, and what are basic office skills. We've brought them back from Iraq and Afghanistan, with all the trauma associated with those conflicts, and have asked them to go out and find jobs while we are still coming out of a recession. Jobs are hard to find, and they don't really know what a non-military job is or what's expected. Not surprisingly, unemployment among Vets is significantly higher than the national average.

Working with their fellow Vets and the lab supervisors (each lab has two – one for artifacts and the other for archives – ours are Patrick Rivera and Caroline Bradford, respectively), the Vets get a chance to learn how to work in an office and what is expected, but they learn this in a comfortable setting working with other Vets. Most of them develop an interest in archaeology and history and enjoy the chance to learn about the past, so these are jobs that intellectually engage them and that they take pride in. They develop a lot of records management and office skills: working with various software and databases, data entry, preparing

reports, scanning, photography, organization, etc. that translate very well to professional office jobs. They are also given additional training in things like preparing a professional resume and interview skills. The program has been extremely successful – since 2009, 124 veterans have gone through the program and 84% have either found a job or gone back to school following completion. Meanwhile, the Corps has worked on 173 archaeological collections, and has prepared 804 boxes of artifacts and 101.5 linear feet of records from water resource projects in six different districts.

PH: The VCP sounds like a rewarding experience. What has most surprised you about this program?

JWJ: Most Vets have either Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We met with a VA Psychologist as part of our orientation to the program and he told us that repetitive exercises are exactly what the VA prescribes for Vets with TBI and PTSD, but that it is hard to get them to do those as volunteers. With the VCP, they are being paid to do these repetitive tasks and they have an interest in the objects they are sorting and counting, so this work is also helping to reconnect their brain synapses and recover from the trauma of war. No one expected that when the VCP was being developed.

The VCP is easily the most rewarding project I've ever been associated with – it is a great success story and Sonny and his colleagues at the St. Louis District, particularly Dr. Susan Malin-Boyce, Kate McMahon, and Andrea Adams, deserve all of our thanks for making this happen. The program is currently supported by the Corps, but the current funding level is less than it

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was during ARRA. The Corps has more collections that could benefit from this type of operation and other locations where VCP labs could be established if Congress was willing to provide more funds for the program. If SEAC members have a Representative or Senator committed to helping our nation's veterans, please let them know about this program. The website is veteranscurriculumprogram.org - it deserves our support.

PH: You two co-founded New South and continue to run it today. How do your management and leadership styles differ?

MBR: I prefer more structure than Joe. That is probably a product of coming from a large family and my years in Catholic school. New South Associates is currently organized by departments, each department has a director, there is a clear chain-of-command, and everyone knows their roles and expectations. Work plans are prepared for all projects, deliverables are entered into a master schedule, and QAI/QC is performed. But my sense of efficiency does not get in the way of fun. We do have fun at New South!

Joe likes to say that his management style developed from his experience as coach of our daughter's soccer team. He is more inclined to define goals and objectives but shift roles and responsibilities if that is what he thinks it will take to best meet those objectives. For example, he would change players' positions in games based on what match-ups he thought worked best and he wanted all of his players to be able to play every field position. We compromise some days on how to get things done. But the end result is making this a place where we would want to work.

PH: This idea of being able to play every position raises one of my persistent (and maybe unfounded) concerns about the over-specialization of Generation X and Y archaeologists; that, many times I hear archaeologists classifying themselves exclusively as a "lithics person" or a "faunal person" or "historic archaeologist." Is there room today for the generalist, for the archaeologist who can play every position?

MBR/JWJ: Yes, as a matter of fact we think that is one of the benefits of Cultural

Resource Management (CRM) archaeology; that it allows you to look at different, but related sites, in different places to develop a broader understanding of cultures and the past. However, we think there are limits in how much you can be a generalist – it is very hard to know the current research on the Archaic and plantation archaeology at the same time. We encourage archaeologists to develop an emphasis in one of the two major subfields, prehistory or history, although in CRM archaeology you should be prepared to work in either if required. Pigeon-holing yourself into a tighter specialization (i.e. lithic analyst, urban archaeologist) is not beneficial; what a CRM firm looks for is an archaeologist with strong analytical skills who can work in a variety of settings.

PH: A common complaint I hear from archaeologists who've been at it for 30 years or more is that the younger generations of archaeologists have lots of classroom experience but lack sufficient field experience. I wonder if this is less a generational difference and due more to the changing nature of archaeological projects and opportunities to gain experience; that there are more students and fewer (and smaller and different) projects as compared earlier decades. Do you agree?

MBR/JWJ: Field experiences shape an archaeologist as much if not more than classroom learning and we think there are significant differences in current fieldwork versus what was available when we were both coming up. Our generation had the opportunity to work on multiple large-scale data recoveries, often on reservoir projects, which had several advantages. First, working on a data recovery you have the chance to work with more field peers (we've worked on projects with crews that numbered 30+) and there is more debate and discussion about archaeology, findings, and interpretations than there is on a survey project where the field archaeology itself doesn't generate as much content for discussion. Second, working on these large projects we had the chance to work with a lot of different archaeologists, so we took away from that a broader range of perspectives and approaches and also developed friendships with colleagues that rose through the ranks

with us at other organizations and agencies. Third, some of the projects we worked on, such as Richard B. Russell Reservoir for Joe, saw multiple firms and universities at work on different sites at the same time, so these projects helped us develop an understanding of how we would like to see projects run once we had our own firm.

Most of the work we see today is survey, and while you can learn good survey skills on those projects, you don't get as engaged in the archaeology. On a data recovery project the crew at night is likely to be talking archaeology over beers; on a survey project they're not talking archaeology (they are still drinking beer, however). And we don't see those large-scale projects, like the reservoir projects, where multiple crews are at work in the same area and able to benefit from cross-fertilization (pipeline projects may have multiple recovery crews at work at the same time but they are likely to be geographically spread out). Today's young archaeologists don't get the same immersion in archaeology that we had and it's largely because the nature of the field has changed.

PH: Acknowledging that the nature of projects has changed, what can university programs do to better educate and train the next generation of archaeologists so they have the knowledge and skills necessary to better meet the demands of the marketplace and expectations of employers?

MBR/JWJ: Older CRM projects could be used as "case studies" of how archaeology is conducted, having students review how research designs were developed, sites surveyed and evaluated, mitigation efforts, and ultimately analysis, interpretation and data recovery reporting. If these were used in a CRM course setting then you could also add in any analysis of budgets and performance metrics. This would be a way to engage students in thinking about site investigations in the real world setting of compliance archaeology, and it would allow them to see and understand a complex data recovery to a greater degree than they will get from any field project alone.

PH: Any thoughts on work-life balance for archaeologists? Archaeologists obvi-

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ously aren't alone in trying to balance this equation, but does the ethical imperative implicit in stewardship and conservation of archaeological sites complicate work-life challenges for archaeologists? You all are involved in archaeological and historical organizations on many levels. How do you all maintain this balance?

MBR/JWJ: *If you are in archaeology or historic preservation, it has to be a life, not a career. We're both doing what we do because we enjoy it and we volunteer because this is our hobby as well as our profession. It is what we like to do, so doing it in different contexts, as volunteer editors or president of a historical society or whatever is still enjoyable. If you have gone into archaeology as a career then that may be a mistake – you likely won't make as much money as your cohorts working in different industries and you'll need to put in extra hours to get the most out of your sites, data, and job.*

We recognize that we set the bar at New South. We encourage our staff to volunteer and be active, to give papers and publish, because we all, as professionals, have an obligation to give something back to the discipline that engages us. And in our experience, the ones who are the most engaged are also the happiest.

We are fortunate because we are both in the same field and share the same interests and, in some cases, the same deadlines. This makes managing our workplace and home-life easier. It is likely more challenging for staff whose spouses are in other fields because they may experience push back on spending weekends writing or editing papers or doing other volunteer efforts, and that is a personal balance that each professional has to resolve individually. No easy answers there.

PH: *I want to shift the conversation to some national issues as they relate to archaeology. In a recent [NY Times editorial](#), Tom Friedman wrote "When everything and everyone becomes connected, and complexity is free and innovation is both dirt-cheap and can come from anywhere, the world of work changes." Does this have any bearing on the future of archaeology?*

MBR/JWJ: *The world we work in is definitely changing, in both the work place itself and the way work is being accomplished, in ways*

parallel to those Friedman reviews. From our perspective, archaeology has gone through more change in the past decade than it has in three decades before that and we think the pace of change will only increase in the years ahead. We'll give two examples. On the one front we have GIS, which allows us to map and model spatial data in ways that were incredibly labor-intensive, if even feasible, before. When we receive a project now we are able, in most states, to order the site data for the location; to project and calculate our shovel test placement; to determine soils, slope, drainage, aspect and other attributes that influence site locations; and when fieldwork is done we can share shapefiles with spatial data down to the location of the shovel tests with our clients and agencies so they can accurately incorporate our findings into their plans and designs. The result is more accurate data, more comprehensive analysis, more quickly, and at less cost. We think the next phase in the use of GIS will be a greater use of predictive modeling, which has always been a goal of archaeology, but is one that is now attainable.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the internet and social media that allow us to share our work and analyses with both our colleagues and the public in an immediate way. The ability to instantaneously share images and questions about a project or an artifact with our colleagues and the public is changing the way we work, making us part of a larger collaborative community rather than isolated individuals.

PH: *Where does innovation occur in archaeology today, and is there room for experimentation in a field like ours that's so driven by deliverables and schedules?*

MBR/JWJ: *We think a lot of innovation comes out of University research programs but it is the responsibility of firms and agencies involved in CRM to see the benefits of a particular technology and to invest in that technology to improve their operations. We see a direct link between technology and innovation. From our experience, investment is almost always the first step of innovation. We've always viewed new technologies as vital to how we work and have always been willing to make the investments in the technology, and in virtually every instance those*

investments have paid off. When we started New South Associates with Tom Wheaton we were working out of our houses – we couldn't afford an office yet – but we had pooled our money and had a little to invest in start up costs and decided to buy a fax machine. Faxing was a new technology at that time – the firm where we had previously worked was a large CRM firm who did not have a fax. So we got a fax machine and the history of New South Associates is probably a different history because of that one piece of equipment. Pretty soon we were getting calls from engineering firms that needed to get a bid and an award quickly and we could correspond by fax, rather than losing days to RFPs mailed out and proposals mailed back in. So that one technology purchase put us immediately on the map.

A more recent example is geophysics. When Shawn Patch joined our North Carolina office, he had experience with geophysics from work with GDOT and asked if we were interested in adding geophysics to our capabilities. The equipment was expensive, and at that date we had not seen a single RFP calling for geophysics, but we recognized the benefits and invested. Today we do a significant amount of geophysics work – the volume has grown every year – and having the capability we're able to see projects through a different lens and use approaches that bring geophysics into the mix, and time after time the geophysics have provided tremendous cost benefits and results to our clients. Shawn and his colleague Sarah Lowery recently completed a geophysics survey of the 24-acre Atlanta Multi-Modal Passenger Transit Center site that generated fantastic mapping of buried structures and features on the site, tied to geo-referenced historic maps in GIS, and in combination provided a tremendous resource to GDOT at a fraction of the cost of a traditional survey. If we hadn't had those capabilities we probably would have approached the project with backhoes and test trenches at a greater cost and taking much more time. Innovation has cost benefits, but they are not immediate and they require investment in technology, exploration of what it can do, and then application to projects.

PH: *It seems like every week there's a headline in the national news about big data, about its risks and rewards. What*

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does big data mean for archaeology, and does it pose any unique risks?

MBR/JWJ: We don't think archaeology has true big data – what we have instead is lots of data, which presents challenges for storage and curation. In order to have big data the data needs to share attributes and be comparable. What we see in southeastern archaeology is a lot of different databases from different sites developed by different archaeologists at different firms and different universities that are not directly comparable. We don't have any analytical standards that result in similar collections being classified the same way and as a result we largely don't have comparable datasets or big data from our excavations.

There are some exceptions. Sites are the best. Here, we do have datasets with comparable systems of classification (although Phase names change across state lines) so we have the potential to analyze lots of sites, with lots of attributes, over large areas, a big data type analysis. And, site data is also our risk – there is the potential for hackers to gain access to these data sets and use that access to locate and loot sites. We don't know the sophistication of most state site files and GIS layers but we're willing to bet a hacker could gain access. And that is something we should worry about – on the historic side, we have seen a jump in the amount of metal detecting site looting going on in response to programs like "Diggers" and as the economy stays slow and people look for nickels and dimes because they've given up looking for a buck.

PH: The UN Conference on Trade and Development recently said that "... climate change mitigation is a huge new market opportunity" and Oxfam America has even coined the term "adaptation marketplace" to reflect the existence of this market as a fully-formed sector of the economy. Setting aside, as much as possible, the human dimension and politics of climate change, are there trends in CRM toward marketing to this sector of the economy and, if so, what do they look like?

MBR/JWJ: Efforts to address the effects of coastal flooding will be managed through the Corps of Engineers and will likely involve

numerous large engineering firms with experience in water management. We don't think there is anything explicit CRM firms can do to market to that future sector of the economy until plans are developed and scopes written. We do think the nature of how we conduct compliance archaeology needs to evolve to address the scale and scope of that effort, however.

PH: Coastal areas are already seeing effects of rising sea levels. What specializations or areas of archaeological expertise will likely be in highest demand in the "adaptation marketplace?"

MBR/JWJ: We think the federal response to rising sea levels will attempt to maintain key coastal ports through the construction of flood control levees and pump systems, much like those that already exist for New Orleans, so there may be a greater need for archaeologists with knowledge of coastal environments and cultures to meet the compliance needs of those large-scale projects. But we think the greater effect of rising sea levels on compliance archaeology will be felt in the interior, in the Sand Hills and Piedmont physiographic provinces, as citizens and industries displaced from the coastal regions relocate and significantly increase population densities and infrastructure needs. This will result in a need to expand road networks, water and sewer services, for example. Coupled with the forecast of a hotter, drier climate, there is a very strong likelihood for a future round of major reservoir construction, comparable and possibly greater than what the Corps of Engineers, TVA, and others did in the mid-twentieth century. The Atlanta metro area is already facing the need for expanded sources of water due to a growing population and the effects of droughts.

We see two potential outcomes of the scale and cost of this effort of the coastal mitigation effects. The first is that Congress waives compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and other environmental laws in the funding authorization for coastal mitigation. The second is that we as the discipline of compliance archaeology evolve to make better use of technologies to conduct focused, less labor intensive, identification and recovery efforts. We think the latter will be a growing trend regardless of

climate change, as federal budgets become ever tighter, and we as a field need to adapt more cost effective approaches or suffer the consequences. We think the future of compliance archaeology will make greater use of geophysical survey techniques, predictive modeling, GIS, LIDAR, drones, and other technologies to forge a new archaeological paradigm where digging and analysis is only an element, not the emphasis, of how archaeology is done.

There is another aspect of compliance archaeology that is already on us, and will certainly grow in the future as climate change progresses, and that is disaster archaeology. We think there is a need for training that prepares archaeologists to address the results of natural disasters during the recovery phase.

PH: Last question. Tell me about one formative experience or person who really influenced you as a historian or archaeologist. What did you learn and how has it served you in your career?

MBR: Sister Shawn, a Roman Catholic sister of the Immaculate Heart order with a PhD in history, took a hiatus from teaching at Catholic University for a year and got the plum assignment of teaching US history to sophomores at Bishop Conwell High School in Levittown, PA. I had the good fortune to land in her class. Sister Shawn taught both history and culture with gusto, always emphasizing the need for us to get out and see where history happened. She showed me the importance of a sense of place way before that phrase became entrenched in the historic preservation lexicon.

JWJ: Stan South. Stan was the first archaeologist I worked with who made me look past artifacts and features to see the cultures that created them. Stan's enthusiasm and love of the field is infectious and I've always strived to follow in his footsteps. ■

Have any comments or ideas for a Random Sample interview? Email them to Phillip.Hodge@tn.gov