

PROVENIENCE

The word *provenience* is something most people outside of the field of archaeology, specifically North American archaeology, may not be familiar. Perhaps you've heard a similar word, *provenance*? They both are derived from the French word *provenir*, "to come from." Provenience is usually used in the museum world to refer to the origin and life history of an object. For instance, you may have noticed the little plaques beside paintings that detail the artist, the artist's county of origin, birth (and death) year, the medium and materials used, etc. These plaques also often contain the accession number of the piece. That number will connect to a catalog where the entire known history of the object will be recorded, including when the museum acquired it, or if it's on loan, who does own the piece and who are all the people who ever have, possibly how much the object is valued at, and any record of conservation.

Provenience of an archaeological find is similar in many ways to the recording of a museum item. In archaeology we record exactly where an item was found. Provenience is a three-dimensional record of recovery and then some. Every time we dig, we write down exactly how we're doing it. This means recording the project name and institution, the date, excavators' names, the unit location and/or number, level, stratum, depth, datum, and method of excavation. This information is crucial to the archaeological investigation and is duplicated many times through the process on paperwork, bags, tags, catalogs—everywhere!

It's important to remember in the lab to keep provenience information with the artifacts you're working with. Every time you remove an

artifact that has not been labeled and cataloged, the proper provenience must stay with it at all times. If provenience information is lost somewhere along the line, the artifact—no matter how individually impressive it might be—will be scientifically useless.

REMEMBER! The difference between scientific archaeological investigation and looting is WRITING IT ALL DOWN!

One way to appreciate the hard work it takes to keep the massive amount of information in order is to be involved in both the excavation and the laboratory analysis and curation that follow. Many of the best "Labbies" are also "Fieldies" and vice versa.

HOW TO PROVENIENCE FOR FORT DANIEL

Site Name	Fort Daniel
Site Number	9GW623
North-Easting (Unit Number)	500N/500E (Unit 1)
(Quadrant)	(SW Quad)
Stratum	Strat II
Level	Level 3
Depth (Metal Detected)	20-25 CMBD
Date	2/14/2016
Excavators' Initials	JP

A GOOD PLACE TO START:

"Archaeology for Dummies" by Nancy Marie White, 2008.

Wikipedia entry on "Provenience."

www.archaeologywordsmith.com