



REGIONAL DESCRIPTION OF COLLECTIONS

Arctic and Subarctic

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The Robert S. Peabody Museum has long been associated with a record of distinguished, paradigm-defining research in culture history and environmental archaeology, much of it conducted in the Northeastern United States. By dint of its longevity and its commitment to an active local research program, the Robert S. Peabody Museum has emerged as the most significant repository of archaeological materials pertaining to the full pageant of human occupation in the region: from the time of the arrival of paleoindian colonizers in the lee of the Wisconsin glacial ice, through the entire cultural panoply of indigenous occupations of the region, up to and including 19th century New England African-American house sites. The Robert S. Peabody Museum collections are unique, unparalleled, and of exceptional significance given their provenance, curation and history. This is true for the entire collection although especially germane for the Northeast, in that the museum not only houses the key collections from the core area, eastern New England and Maine, but also a wealth of materials from the adjacent region – in this case the Canadian subarctic and Maritime Provinces– that provide important comparative data sets that serve to situate the New England collections in an interregional context. As such, the Canadian collections at the Robert S. Peabody Museum greatly enhance and augment the New England collections in that they enable students and researchers to look beyond the immediate confines of specific sites and archaeological assemblages to examine regional and inter-regional cultural processes.

Female figure, Northwest Alaska, c. 1778-1896

The Robert S. Peabody Museum houses a modest but extremely interesting set of archaeological materials from northern Labrador and central Quebec, collections that form the intellectual bedrock of the region. The William Duncan Strong collection of artifacts (excavated in 1927 and 1928) from prehistoric Indian and Inuit sites in Labrador and from 18th century Labrador Inuit villages and graves mark the inception of professional archaeological research in Labrador. The educational potential of the Strong collections lies in its comparative value, an opportunity to examine notions of long-distance exchange and influence that might have been operating between Labrador and New England. The Labrador Inuit collections, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, provide exciting opportunities to explore the material dimension of culture contact as the economic and intellectual dimensions of Inuit culture become increasingly intertwined with those of European fishermen, traders and missionaries. Early 1960 research results of the Edward Rogers collections (Lake Mistassini region of south-central Quebec) mark the beginning of research in the boreal forest of eastern Canada and forms the foundation on which subsequent research conducted in anticipation of flooding resulting from Quebec's huge hydro-electric dam projects was predicated. Many of the sites that Rogers discovered and excavated are associated with a prominent outcrop of Mistassini chert, a distinctive lithic raw material that was critical to Native American economies throughout Quebec and the greater Northeast. The Rogers' collection is an exceptional tool for exploring a host of questions about lithic technology and stone tool manufacturing processes.



When considering the extent of the Arctic and subarctic holdings at the Robert S. Peabody Museum there is one last important archaeological collection that should be mentioned. This is the Patricia Hume collection of 800 artifacts recovered from eroding deposits at the sites of Utqiagvikat, Nuwuk, Birnirk and Rocket near Point Barrow, Alaska. These well documented materials serve to illustrate the domestic economy of Point Barrow communities through a considerable span of prehistory, and provide students with an excellent contrast to life in the area today.

In addition to the outstanding archaeological collections at the heart of the institution, the Robert S. Peabody Museum arctic and subarctic emphasis is further strengthened by its ethnological collections of clothing, domestic paraphernalia and hunting gear from Alaska and Canada.