The ASBC Private Collections Project
# A Resource for Research

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One of the notable accomplishments of the ASBC has been its extensive efforts in documenting of private artifact collections. The project got started in 1972, and volunteers in different parts of the province photographed and measured artifacts from over 200 collections. The result is an inventory that includes an astonishing array of items, from projectile points to stone bowls. Over the years, we have reported in *The Midden* about the status of the project. In this issue, we showcase photographs that derive from those labours. These sample images are a testament to the quality of the work those volunteers conducted. More to the point, we hope to show that this huge inventory is another valuable resource for researchers.

The amount of volunteer time put into this project is astonishing. The idea was first put forth by ASBC members Brian and Isabel Byrnes back in 1969. The objective was simply to make more publicly available the broad array of artifacts from the region held in individual hands. It should be stressed that the position of the ASBC is to oppose the collecting of artifacts, except under conditions by permit from the province or First Nations (Ormerod 2003). The ASBC also opposes the sale of artifacts, not wishing to encourage dollar values for artifacts. However, the ASBC also has long held "artifact identification" nights to encourage the showing of artifacts are already privately held. Those nights also served as opportunities to educate the public about heritage protection, provincial laws, artifact context, and the integrity of sites (e.g., ASBC 2003).

The Private Collections Project offered another avenue for educating collectors. Moreover, the inventory served to make these private collections a contribution to regional research, making these pieces more publicly accessible. As Fred and Helmi Braches (1996:7) noted, this "plainly seemed a task for the ASBC, operating as a link between the general public and professionals."

To document a collection, volunteers would bring light tables and set the artifacts on a glass plate, with a label for artifact identification. The material type was recorded, condition of the artifacts, and its provenience (if known). By 1976, twenty collections had been documented (Russell 1976), and within
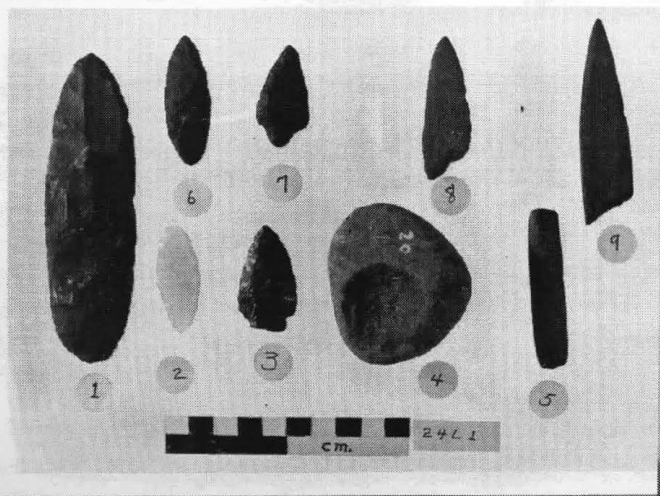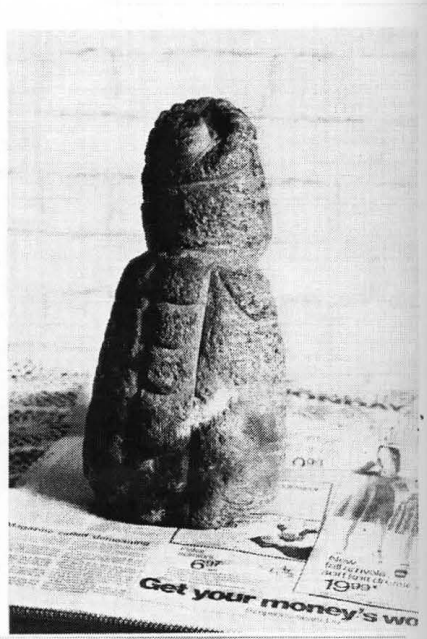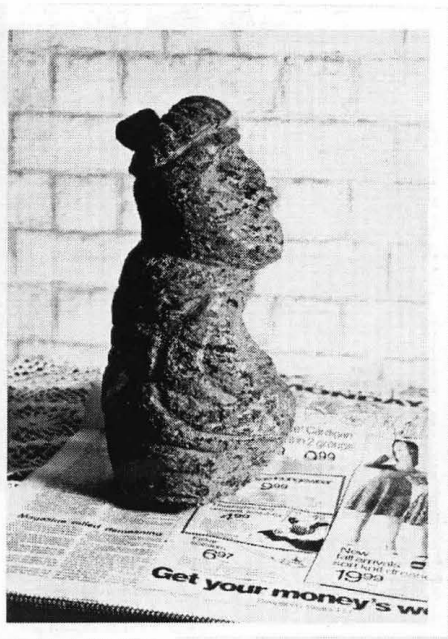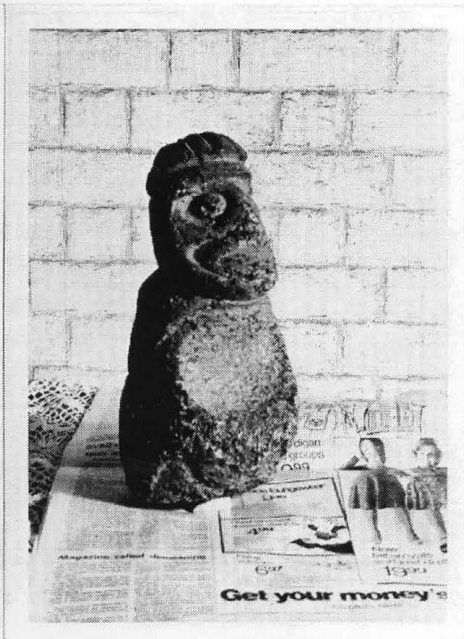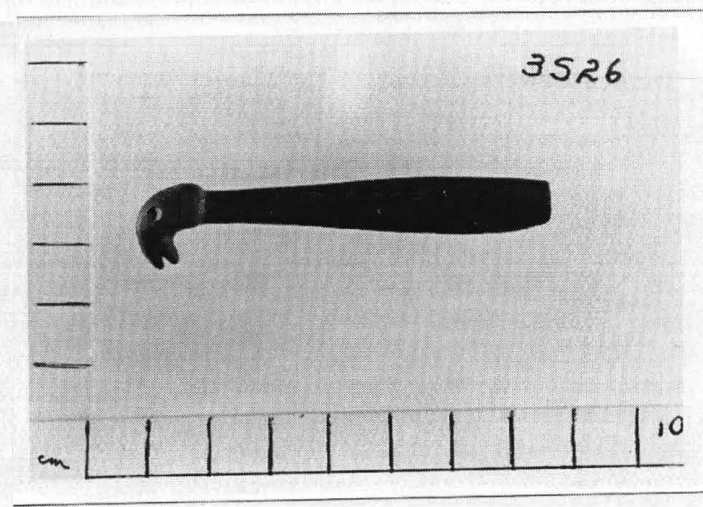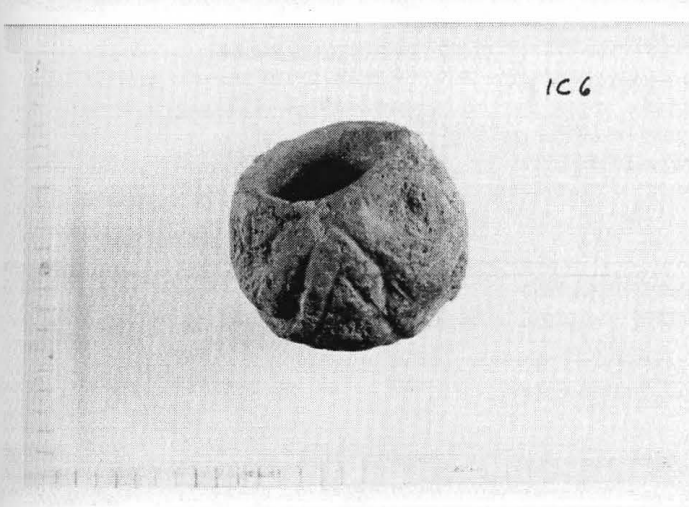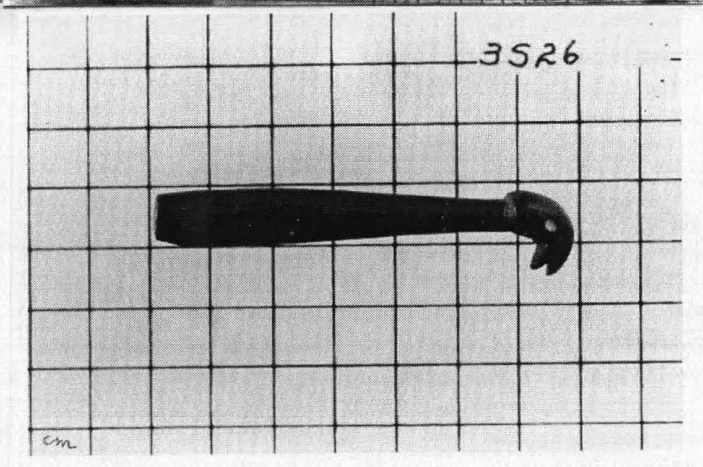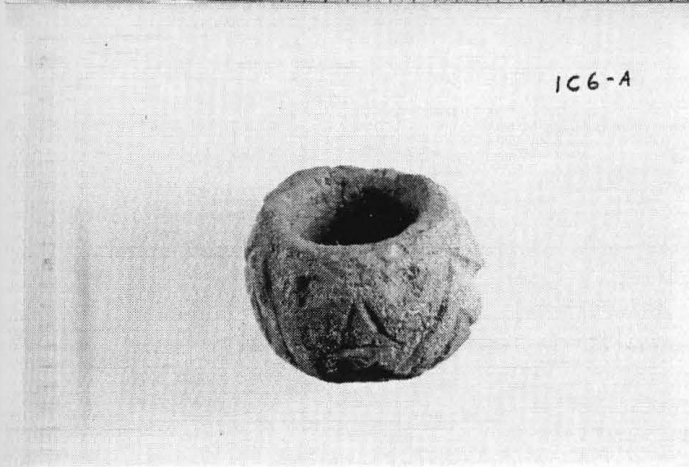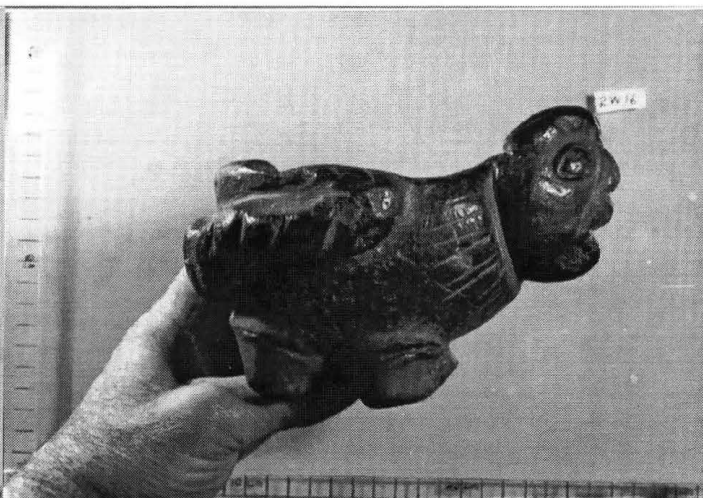
a couple years the number of collections included had tripled, including 679 photographs of 7,660 artifacts. When Don Bunyan (1978) reported on the progress of the collection before the Canada Council (they had provided a grant to support the work), he remarked that the collection was already being used in research projects. In 1980, the number of collections reached 100, including over 10,000 artifacts documented, with "several teams" operating in the province from Vancouver Island to the Interior (Russell 1980). By 1987, the number of collections recorded had doubled once again (Adory 1987). The last report on the project put the total number of artifacts in the inventory at 11,564 (Braches and Braches 1996:8).

The system used to document the inventory unfortunately is not up to contemporary database standards by any means; as Don Bunyan (n.d.) noted years ago, it was an "already antiquated system." But, for some, it may nostalgic or interesting to experience a key-punch card system and learn how vast amounts of information were categorized not long ago. The collection is currently at the Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia (contact the Laboratory of Archaeology). If you access them, there is a brief manual to the collection (ASBC n.d.; page one shown). The key cards contain thirty-one punch

holes: twenty-seven mark the type of artifact from abraders to "whatzits"; and five are used for material type, from stone to other.

To search the cards for a particular category of artifact, you have to make sure to make sure a set of cards to search are aligned. Then, you stick a sorting needle through the punch hole for the artifact category of interest. Next, you have to lift the needle and shake to loosen the card stack: the cards punched for the selected category will drop from the set. At that point, for instance, you could also sort your subset once again, restricting artifact types by a certain material type. Once you have your card set, you can look up the photographs and record sheets identified on each card.

Well, I think that demonstrates a need for updating the system from key-hole punch to keyword search. It would be great to be able to search the system on the ASBC website, for instance. That, of course, requires even more volunteer effort, but it would have a significant pay-off and would actually encourage more use of this inventory. In the meantime, however, this old-school system works just fine, culling the IDs that link to the high-quality photographs and associated information.

While we have reported on the collection in *The Midden*, we haven't yet showcased the photographs. Here we feature many images of stone bowls and some striking artifacts. These include examples of small bowls with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic imagery that could be held in the palm of one's hand. There are also examples of artistic pendants or other portable artforms. There are also photographs of projectile point sets. Other photographs are provided throughout the rest of the issue, including the cover.

These photographs indicate the quality of the artifacts in the private collections, and these are pieces that otherwise would not be known. It's certainly another valuable collection to consider when doing research for any area in the province.

Brian and Isabel Byrnes, founders of the Private Collections Project, during the early days of the ASBC

References

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Braches, Fred, and Helmi Braches
1996   The Private Collections Project. *The Midden* 28(4):7-8.

Russell, Nick
1980   More than 100 Private Collections Photographed and Recorded by A.S.B.C. Field Teams. *The Midden* 12(4):5.

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1976   The Private Collections Committee: An Ongoing A.S.B.C. project. *The Midden* 8(2):8.

(Opposite Page) Above Left: Detail of a key-punch card; Above Right: Card catalog, sample key-punch cards, and the hole-punch pin used to search the catalog one drawer at a time. Below: A page from the manual, showing artifact categories for the system.
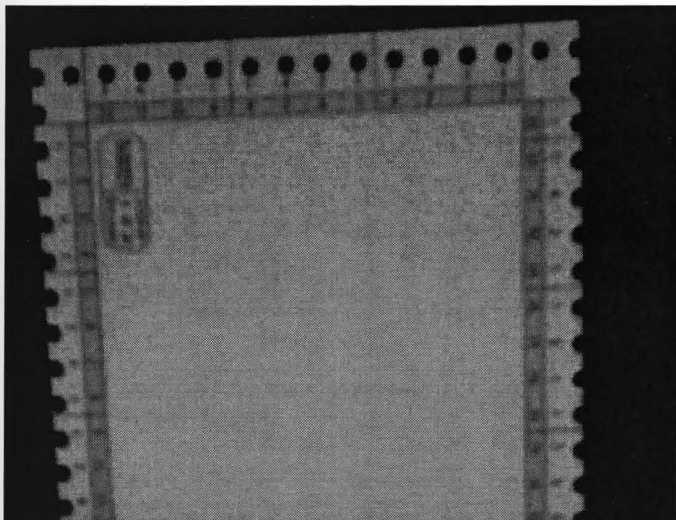
HOW TO USE THE A. S. B. C. "PRIVATE COLLECTIONS" FILES

The files have four separate sections:

1. Photographic prints, $3\frac{1}{2}$"x5", in a card-file cabinet.
2. Record sheets, in a two-drawer legal-size filing cabinet.
3. Photographic negatives, in a negative album stored in the filing cabinet.
4. Key-sort retrieval cards, $3\frac{1}{4}$"x$7\frac{1}{2}$", in a card-file cabinet.

The retrieval cards, which are "key-sort" cards edge-punched for hand sorting, provide the access to the other sections of the files.   In the punching of each card is encoded information about all the objects pictured in the related photographic print and negative and listed in the corresponding record-sheet.   Once a card has been selected by the sorting process, the number-letter-number file reference written on the card shows which photograph and record-sheet it relates to.

Thirty-one punching positions are employed in the code, twenty-six for artefact categories and five for materials, as follows:

Hole No.	Description	Hole No.	Description
1	Abraders	17	Pebble tools, choppers
2	Adzes, chisels	18	Perforated, notched, grooved or circular objects, sinkers.
3	Awls, pins	19	Pestles
4	Baskets, fibres	20	Pile drivers
5	Beads, dentalium	21	Points
6	Bowls, mortars	22	Scrapers, knives, saws, shovels.
7	Burins, gravers		
8	Carved, sculptured.	23	Tubular objects, tubes, pipes.
8a	Cores	24	Wedges
9	Contact material	25	Whatzits
10	Decorative, personal.	26	MATERIAL: stone
11	Drills, perforators	27	" bone, antler
12	Hafts	28	" shell
13	Hammers, mauls	29	" wood
14	Microblades	30	" other
15	Misc raw materials, including ochre.	31	Flakes. (Later entries only)
16	Needles		