



The Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology

July 14, 2011

Chancellor Merryl H. Tisch
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Board of Regents, Room 110 EB
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Chancellor Tisch:

On behalf of the Executive Board of the Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology, and on behalf of all of our members, I wish to express our deepest concern with the proposed layoffs of key professionals at the New York State Museum. Specifically, the proposed termination of the State Archaeologist/Director of the Cultural Resource Survey Program, the Curator of Archaeology, and the Curator of Historical Archaeology will undermine the legislated function of the State Museum to the extent that it will no longer be able to adequately perform its role as an educational resource for the citizens of New York State, nor serve its role as the permitting and oversight authority for mandated archaeological survey within the State nor its role as the major repository for the State's archaeological collections. It is also our feeling that the elimination of these key positions places the State's historical and archaeological sites and resources in peril by limiting the Museum's role as steward and manager of these irreplaceable resources, and, further, that such a measure will negatively impact the heritage tourism industry that is so important to the State's economy.

The Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology (CNEHA) is a non-profit educational organization with over 400 members in the eastern United States and Canada. Our membership comprises professional archaeologists, historians, educators, and cultural resource specialists. The sole purpose of the Council is to stimulate and encourage the collection, preservation, advancement, and dissemination of knowledge gained through the study and practice of historical archaeology. The Council specifically encourages fieldwork, collections research, conservation, education, and public outreach. This matter is of special concern to us because the Council was founded in New York State in 1966 by professional and avocational archaeologists and historians who were alarmed by the destruction and loss of historical and archaeological resources in the region. The Council grew out of their awareness of the need to preserve and protect the historical archaeological record and to share that past with others. Our relationship with the State of New York has continued for over forty years; the Council holds its charter from the State, our mid-year meeting is always held in the State, and our annual conference has convened here on numerous occasions. Our assets are located in financial institutions within the State. And our journal office has been based at Buffalo State, State University of New York, since 2008. Thus we feel the Council is a stakeholder in the State's historical, archaeological, and educational programs. New York residents also make up the largest group of members within the

Council and include many professionals working for State and federal agencies, the State University system, and contract firms. The strength of our membership in New York over the last forty years is a reflection of the value placed on the State's archaeological and historical resources by its citizens, but it is also a testament to the State's steady commitment to the preservation and stewardship of these important resources. We believe that commitment is jeopardized by the proposed cutbacks at the State Museum.

The proposed cuts will also have a detrimental impact to the economy. You are surely aware of the importance that the State's archaeological and historical resources have to a growing and vital heritage tourism industry; the loss of access to and protection of those resources will have a direct and immediate economic impact within the State. You should also know that the archaeological community and those interested in the State's archaeological heritage have generated significant amounts of revenue for the State's economy in the past. In 2006, the Council celebrated its 40th anniversary as an organization in Tarrytown. In 2007, we held our annual meetings in Buffalo. Our 2011 meeting in Utica this fall is expected to pump an initial \$20,000 into the economy through the use of hotel guest rooms and banquet facilities. This figure does not include additional expenditures for travel, meals, tours, workshops, and meetings for 150 conference goers over a four-day period. It is worth noting that our 2009 conference in Quebec City drew nearly 200 participants and funneled approximately \$87,000 CDN into the local economy. This is not an insignificant contribution, especially in light of the recession. The State's commitment to the protection of its resources, or its failure to do so, will impact not only the future actions of organizations such as ours, but it will impact the vacation and recreational plans of residents and out-of-state visitors, as well as the State's highly praised educational programs that are built upon access to and enjoyment of those resources.

We understand that the State of New York faces difficult issues involving its budget and how to meet its legislated role to providing oversight and stewardship for its resources, as well as educational opportunities. We urge you to reconsider the decision to eliminate these positions, and we ask that the State's decisions regarding the Museum be made responsibly, with full understanding of the risks to the State's heritage resources and to the State's already fragile economy. In short, we ask you to bring a thoughtful and responsible approach to the issue at hand.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen B. Metheny". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light blue rectangular background.

Dr. Karen Metheny
Chair, Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology

cc: The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor, State of New York
Dr. John B. King, Jr., Commissioner of Education, State Education Department
Dr. Clifford A. Siegfried, Director, New York State Museum