

Robinson Collection
ASM Repo #443.1

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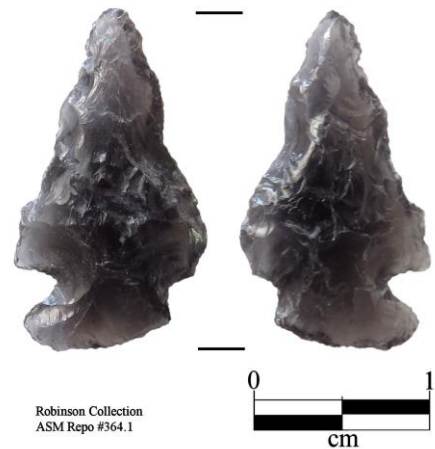
The Robinson Collection Project

A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION TO SAVE
SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTIFACTS

A key element of Preservation Archaeology is a focus on working with existing collections and protecting sites still in the ground. Bringing rescued collections out of garages and closets and back into the larger archaeological world is a particularly satisfying aspect of our work. The Robinson Collection Project is an important example of how these collections can make significant contributions to a better understanding of the past.

In the fall of 2018, Archaeology Southwest launched an all-encompassing volunteer research effort to work on several hundred boxes and thousands of bags of artifacts from the Robinson Collection, an important private collection with emphasis on the Safford Basin region of Southeastern Arizona.

Much of the material in the Robinson Collection appears to date to the Salado period, A.D. 1300–1450. Recent research by Archaeology Southwest and others suggests that the Safford area was an important destination for Kayenta immigrants from the Four Corners in the late 1200s. Because many sites in the Safford region have been lost due to historic and modern large-scale agricultural and mining activities, this collection holds potential for significant insights into this time period in the southern Southwest.



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Banner: Cliff/ Gila Polychrome bowl (unrestored), Cork site. **Right:** Obsidian Projectile Point, Safford Basin. **Bottom left:** 2024 Robinson Team: Harlow Sires, Mary Graham, Phillip Hunger, Joyce Clarke; not pictured: Valerie Freireich-Kaplan, Jaye Smith. **Bottom right:** Photographers Lance and Sandra Trask.



More about Ray Robinson and How the Collection Came to Be

Raymond F. Robinson was a geologist with a passion for archaeology. He worked in mining and exploration for ASARCO, Duval, Phelps Dodge, and other companies throughout the west. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Robinson was working on his own time with local ranch owners and archaeologists to identify sites and collect representative artifacts from the surrounding regions. He was careful to record what site each artifact came from for most of the material he collected.

Robinson curated this material at his various homes for over 50 years, but as he approached age 100, he became increasingly concerned for the final disposition of his collection. He did not want the material to be thrown away or sold on the open market to the highest bidder. His connections led him to Chris Downum and Kelley Hays-Gilpin at Northern Arizona University, who immediately recognized the collection's potential. Chris and Kelley contacted Archaeology Southwest for assistance. Archaeology Southwest in turn contacted the Arizona State Museum, who agreed to accept the collection, with an agreement that Archaeology Southwest would partner with them to prepare the material for final curation. Thanks to the help of a number of colleagues throughout the Southwest, including the Smith Living Trust who generously stepped up to help with the expenses of bringing the material from its location in Reno, Nevada, to Tucson, the collection found a new home in Tucson in the summer of 2016.

By the standards of his time, Ray Robinson took remarkable care to document and curate the materials he collected. His



attention to detail is a significant reason why this collection is still important for research today. However, today, people are strongly encouraged to *leave any archaeological material they may find in place on the landscape* so its context can tell a more complete story.

*Ray and Jeanne Robinson, 2015.
Photo courtesy Chris Downum.*

Highlights from the 2018–2024 project seasons:

- » The 2024 season focused on the perishable objects in the assemblage and restating ceramic typologies for the Cork and Elmers Farm sites.
- » With assistance from Jeff Clark, Archaeology Southwest's Vice President - Research, the Team has successfully used Robinson's notes and maps to reconstruct the locations of many unrecorded archaeological sites that Robinson visited in the 1950s and 60s.
- » Since project inception, led by Robinson Collection Project lead Jaye Smith, a team of over 30 volunteer researchers have washed, sorted, and inventoried over 200 boxes of artifacts from the collection.
- » A wide variety of artifact types have been processed, including restorable and partially-restorable ceramic vessels, exciting assemblages of ground and chipped stone, as well as faunal, shell, and perishable artifacts.
- » Archeologist and photographer/graphic artist Lance Trask has created hundreds of photos, including many stunning images that captured the layout and designs of the restorable vessels in the collection.
- » 159 completed boxes have been returned to the Arizona State Museum repository. All perishable objects and AFO have been respectfully documented. The data created by the Robinson Team will be entered into the repository's database for future research availability.

In addition to our volunteer researchers, many thanks go to our institutional partners:

- » American Southwest Virtual Museum
- » Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona
- » Northern Arizona University

The Robinson Collection Project is ongoing through 2024/2025. For more information, contact: **Jeff Clark**, Vice President, Research 520-882-6946 jclark@archaeologysouthwest.org
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