Manis Mastodon Collection: An exciting donation to the Washington State Historical Society

Tacoma, WA – Imagine standing beside a mucky pit in your yard on the Olympic Peninsula and hearing “This is the most important archaeological discovery in the world today.” Those words were spoken by Washington State University professor and researcher Dr. Richard Daugherty to Clare and Emanuel Manis on a sweltering Sequim afternoon more than 40 years ago. A dig on their property turned up the remains of an ancient mastodon, and some major surprises, leading to a re-write of North American history. Recently, Clare Manis Hatler decided to donate the collection of over 50 cartons including bones, ivory, teeth, soil samples, stone tools, photographs, field notes, educational materials and more, to the Washington State Historical Society.

"I dedicate this gift to two great men," Hatler remarked. "This gift would not have happened without Emanuel Manis, who made the effort to share the site with the public. He wanted everyone to participate in and learn about the wonderful discoveries made daily during the dig. Secondly, to Dr. Carl E. Gustafson, a dedicated professional, investing over 30 years of his life into revealing the site’s mysteries, without expectation of accolades or financial gain. Both men are gone now, Emanuel in 2000 and Carl in 2016, but never to be forgotten."

“We are thrilled to receive the Manis mastodon collection as a donation from Clare Manis Hatler. It is one of the three most important archaeological finds in Washington State history, the others being the East Wenatchee Clovis site and the Ancient One (Kennewick man),” said Lynette Miller, Head of Collections for Washington State Historical Society. “It establishes the timeline of human habitation on this continent, and documents their interaction with large animals in the Northwest. We are honored to have this collection entrusted to our care.”

On a Monday in August of 1977, Emanuel was digging with a backhoe on his farm, endeavoring to build a pond, when he unearthed a pair of giant tusks. Clare immediately began a chain of phone calls leading her to Dr. Richard Dougherty, who was working on the nearby Ozette Indian Village Archeological Site. Within 24 hours he was at the Manis’s farm, as were the local paper, a WSU grad student, and archaeologist Jeanne Welch from the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. Daugherty rang Dr. Carl Gustafson at WSU, advising him to drive over with a crew and equipment.

The team initially thought that Emanuel had uncovered mammoth remains, which made for a noteworthy discovery, but which had also been previously found in the area. Interest grew substantially when Gustafson wiped the mud from a rib bone and exposed what appeared to be an embedded spear point. Then a sizeable, severely worn tooth came up, the team recognized that this was not a mammoth at all but rather an American mastodon – a far more significant find.
A mastodon and a spear point…at that moment, the Manis site was on its way to upending North American history. Why? Because these discoveries placed human civilization in North America nearly 14,000 years ago, before the Clovis people who had been considered the earliest established human culture on the continent.

In addition to the sharp point lodged in the mastodon’s rib bone, Gustafson noted that its fragmented skull lay rotated 180 degrees from its natural position. The skeleton rested on its left side, and the bones of the right side were found scattered, broken and scored several meters away, which Gustafson interpreted as further evidence of human interaction with the mastodon.

Gustafson’s assessment was controversial in the archaeological community. There was no proof that the bit of sharp material embedded in the rib bone was created by humans as he’d proposed (some suggested it may have been the tip of an antler from another animal). Further, Gustafson’s team dated the site based on analysis of organic material, not testing of the mastodon bones.

Decades later, in 2011, Dr. Mike Waters, Director of Texas A & M University's Centre for the Study of the First Americans, entered the picture. His team has been studying some of the Manis mastodon remains, in particular the rib bone with projectile point. Waters’ work confirmed that the bones were 13,800 years old and that the projectile had indeed been crafted by human hands. It was made from another mastodon bone.

“I am thrilled to hear that the Manis mastodon collection is now permanently archived with the Washington State Historical Society where it will be preserved and available for study. This is an important collection that can be studied for many years to come and still has many stories to tell,” Waters commented.

In 1978, the Manis Mastodon Site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2002, on the 25th anniversary of the discovery, Clare Manis Hatler donated the two acre site to the National Archaeological Conservancy. Some of the mastodon bones have also been donated to the Sequim Museum & Arts Center.

The Washington State Historical Society is grateful to Clare Manis Hatler for entrusting the institution with the Manis Mastodon Collection, and looks forward to sharing the collection with visitors at the Washington State History Museum in the future. To learn more about this discovery, listen to Clare tell the story in her own words in the podcast COLUMBIA Conversations (columbiaconversations.org/) and on iTunes).

### Image Credits:
Top: Emanuel Manis and the two mastodon tusks shortly after he unearthed them on his farm near Sequim, Washington, on August 8, 1977. Photo courtesy of Clare Manis Hatler.
Bottom: Fragment of mastodon rib bone with embedded projectile point. Photo courtesy of the Center for the Study of the First Americans, Texas A & M University.

**Washington State Historical Society** partners with our communities to explore how history connects us all. The Society’s most visible activity, the Washington State History Museum (WSHM) is located in Tacoma’s downtown core along Pacific Avenue among a thriving cultural scene. The museum features interactive permanent exhibitions about Washington’s past in the Great Hall, unique rotating exhibitions highlighting the Society’s collections, and dynamic feature exhibitions. **Address:** 1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma, WA 98402 **Hours:** 10:00AM–5:00PM Tuesday through Sunday. Third Thursday of each month, 10:00AM–8:00PM. **Admission:** Free for members; Adults $14; seniors (age 65+), students (age 6-17) and military (with ID) $11; free for children 5 and under; family rate $40 (up to two adults and four children under age 18). Patrons with a Washington Quest card and licensed Washington Foster Parents can attend for $1 per person or $2 per family.