The artifacts are stored in a warehouse that serves as the ultimate attic space for whatever Louisiana archaeologists dig up or send divers down to retrieve. It's a hoarder's paradise as well as a library for future researchers interested in shipwrecks or in artifacts that date from the 1700s to the 1900s.

**State running out of space for artifacts**

**BY MICHELLE MILLHOLLON**
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Tucked into a warehouse off River Road are boxes holding what remains of a Spanish frigate that foundered off Cameron Parish nearly 250 years ago.

The El Nuevo Constante — carrying gold, silver, goatskins and a box of chocolate — collided with a hurricane in 1766 and got mired in mud miles from shore. The crew and passengers abandoned ship in a rowboat but later returned to salvage what they could. Archaeologists found the shipwreck in 1979 and brought broken dishes, ceramic bowls, buckles and ballast stones to shore.

An archaeological curation fund is supposed to accumulate dollars for an expansion of the state warehouse where the wreck and other artifacts are stored.

The state has been raiding the fund to help balance the state's operating budget. In a two-year span, a grab was made for $101,424 from the fund, reducing the collected dollars down to roughly $20,000.

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The cavernous warehouse, an upgrade from the flood-prone basement that the state once used, is rapidly running out of room for archaeologists' discoveries. Remnants found during pipeline and building construction as well as shipwrecks rest in boxes on collapsible shelving.

The warehouse holds 4,000 boxes — containing glass, pottery, animal bones, charcoal and other bits and pieces — and has shelf space for only 400 more.

State archaeologist Charles "Chip" McGimsey said he can barely meet payroll for the warehouse's single worker, let alone buy additional shelves for artifacts from Louisiana's past. The fund generally generates $40,000 a year. The built-up surplus now is virtually gone.

"It's putting us in a difficult situation because we don't have the money that accumulated in the good years," McGimsey said.

At the same time, Jill Yakubik, president and owner of the New Orleans-based Earth Search Inc., is washing and sorting artifacts from a pre-Civil War neighborhood that once sprawled across 12 city blocks in an area bounded by South Claiborne Avenue, Canal Street, Galvez Street and Tulane Avenue. The state hired her to excavate the land that soon will be occupied by a new medical center complex.

Maps and census records tell the area's history. It became a neighborhood in the 1830s. Businesses, including a barrel maker, located there. A school was built, along with an 8- to 9-foot privy in the days before plumbing.

Yakubik found a sword, slate pencils, children's toys, tools, jewelry fragments and bones from long-ago dinners. "Pretty much everything you would expect if you didn't have municipal garbage pickup," she said.

Her finds fill nearly 1,000 boxes, far too many for the state's remaining storage space. The collection will have to be culled.

"It's heartbreaking," Yakubik said. "You know this stuff, by rights, should be curated so other people can access it and utilize it. We're just going to have to start making hard decisions."

The catalog records for artifacts stored at the site. The state of Louisiana is rapidly running out of places to store artifacts, largely because legislators have taken storage fees that could be used to fund an expansion. Artifacts from the site of the new hospital in New Orleans are being washed and analyzed.