In 2017, G. Lee Thomas came to the Institute and donated his South Carolina artifact collection that he had made over nearly a 50-year period (Figure 1). Several of these artifacts we had previously borrowed to conduct various research projects that Lee kindly helped us with. Because of our interest in his finds and him wanting to preserve the archaeological information therein, he generously decided to donate them to SCIAA. We are grateful for his commitment to the archaeological heritage of South Carolina by providing these artifacts and related site information.

Lee comes from a long line of descendants that fought in both the American Revolution and the Civil War. His great grandfather Joe Berry Thomas was in the 62nd NC Infantry Regiment during the Civil War and in 1865 he moved to the Keowee River area near Andrew Picken’s plantation where he married and began a family. Joe Berry Thomas and his many descendants were scattered across Pickens, Oconee, and Greenville Counties. Lee Thomas was born and raised in Liberty, South Carolina and left after high school to enlist in the Air Force. He was stationed at the Royal Thai Airforce Base in Udorn during the Vietnam conflict.

In 1971, he resided in the town of Lexington, South Carolina where he began to find lithic artifacts locally in plowed fields. He contacted Dr. Chapman Milling who had written Red Carolinians who in turn put him in contact with James L. Michie. That began a long and productive relationship under Jim’s tutelage, which enabled Lee to learn about South Carolina archaeology and how he could contribute. Jim introduced him to the Archaeological Society of South Carolina where he attended meetings and began receiving the newsletters and journal South Carolina Antiquities. At that time, Michie was collecting information on Paleoindian sites and artifacts in South Carolina. Through his influence, Lee obtained a copy of Marie Wormington’s Ancient Man in North America and Joffre Coe’s classic study Formative Cultures of the Carolina Piedmont. In order to learn about early sites and help Michie with his Paleoindian research, Lee began to surface collect plowed fields searching for diagnostic fluted points and related tools. He found three Paleoindian lanceolates that Michie recorded, which now exist in the South Carolina Paleoindian Point Data Base as SC375, SC433, and SC434.
During his time with Michie, Lee also began recording his collection sites by filling out site forms and getting the South Carolina trinomial site numbers. Michie explained to him he needed to keep artifacts from a site separate and provide documentation on what was found. One of the useful ways Lee did this was to take a black and white photo of a site collection, which allows for a fairly easy review of the diagnostic artifacts (Figure 2). Michie also taught him that this documentation was not only for the benefit of the present generation, but for generations to come.

Through his years of collecting in South Carolina, Lee filled out numerous site forms for his sites. In the Calhoun County area alone, he recorded 15 new sites and revisited three more previously recorded. He also had his own artifact numbering system using permanent ink. He previously donated a human burial washed out on Persanti Island in Lake Marion from site 38CR76. One significant site he recorded known as Steadman (38LX196) produced a large number of Early Archaic points (Figure 3). One unique artifact from there is an intricately incised stone that is not a familiar motif as best we can tell from South Carolina (Figure 4). Within South Carolina, Lee has documented an extensive number of sites in numerous counties including: Abbeville, Aiken, Anderson, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Beaufort, Calhoun, Clarendon, Chesterfield, Greenville, Hampton, Jasper, Kershaw, Lexington, Newberry, Oconee, Orangeburg, Pickens, Richland, Saluda, Spartanburg, and York.

It is Lee Thomas’ strong feeling that without the teaching and encouragement of Jim Michie, this collection and the site records would not exist. He worked with Lee over several years even while Jim was away at the University of Tennessee in graduate school. He made Lee feel appreciated and honored, and for all of these reasons, he has donated this collection to SCIAA in memory of Jim Michie. G. Lee Thomas is to be commended for his efforts to preserve an important sample of the archaeological record.