

American Indian Libraries Newsletter



Volume 6, Number 2

Winter 1982

ISSN 0193-8207

Tribal Archives Programs: Past & Present

Herman J. Viola, Ph.D.

In an address before the Society of American Archivists in 1977, the eminent historian William T. Hagan described the American Indian as an "archival captive." To be an Indian, he declared, "is to have non-Indians control your documents from which other non-Indians write their version of your history." ["Archival Captive—The American Indian," *The American Archivist* 41, no.2:135, 139 (April 1978).] Hagan did not exaggerate, for Indians as a group lack the resources needed to write personal, family, or tribal history. Few Indian tribes or organizations possess collections of family letters, diaries, photographs, newspaper files, and the like from which they can document their history. Where these exist, and a great many do, they are often in the collections of private, state, and federal historical societies, libraries, and museums.

The reason for this, of course, is that Indians traditionally relied on the skills of oral historians to record and transmit their experience as people. They did not have the concept of history as shared by most non-Indians, and even today few Indians view things like family photographs, letters, drawings, and other memorabilia as things that should be preserved so that the information they contain can be used by later generations to understand and record the history of a family or people. The idea of preserving them for others to use, even relatives, is one not easily accepted by many members of the Indian community.

Fortunately, this attitude is changing. There is a growing awareness in the Indian community that letters, photographs, and records need to be preserved if, as Hagan notes, the Indian of the future is to have a "historical identity." This harsh reality is being forced upon even the most conservative tribes because of the rapid erosion of the remaining vestiges of traditional Indian culture through exposure to radio, television, and the movies. Even relatively remote tribes like the Navajos and Hopis are finding it difficult to retain their language, folklore, and oral history. By the year 2000, linguists predict, perhaps no North American Indian tribe will have a viable language other than English.

Because of these changes, a number of tribes have become interested in acquiring and preserving the existing knowledge of their culture and history by collecting documents and photographs and by conducting oral history programs. This interest, which developed slowly in the 1960s, has grown to such an extent that institutions which either contain American Indian materials or that can provide financial support to tribes to support their collecting efforts are now scarcely able to cope with their requests for assistance.

As director of the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, I have been personally involved with the growing archival and historical interest of the Indian community since my appointment in 1972. With the encouragement and early financial support of Dr. David Warren, director of the Research and Cultural Studies Section of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, I was able to establish the American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program at the Smithsonian, which operated continuously from 1973 until early this year.

The goals of this program were to support American Indians in their desire to learn more about their heritage and to share this knowledge with all Americans by publishing and preserving the surviving records of their past. Altogether, there were eighty participants from fifty-eight tribes whose internships varied from one to twelve weeks, depending upon the quantity of material available to them in the National Archives, Library of Congress, and Smithsonian Institution. The participants were nominated by their tribal governments, but their expenses were borne entirely by the program. A modest allowance to pay for copies of photographs and documents that could be used to begin a tribal archives was also provided.

Although the Smithsonian's archival program has been terminated because of budgetary constraints, it is about to be replaced by a more comprehensive one that will operate on a national level. Sponsored by a consortium of organizations concerned about the lack of attention being given to

documents, records, and other tribally owned historical and cultural materials, the program has been endorsed and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The program, in fact, has come about because of the interest and enthusiasm of certain officials at the endowment, especially Sally Yerkovich of the Office of Special Programs, who had witnessed a dramatic increase in recent years of applications from Indian tribes for archival type projects. In December 1980, the National Endowment for the Humanities called a meeting of representatives of various Indian, state, federal, and private organizations to assess the archival needs of the Indian community. The assembled group declared that tribal archives were a priority for Native Americans at this time. The participants predicted, moreover, that the need for such archives would grow rather than diminish, and they painted a rather bleak picture of the current state of tribal records. Unlike small, rural, non-Indian communities, tribes do not have historical associations or groups that have collected and preserved their important documents. What material the tribes do have is often in an advanced state of deterioration and disarray, usually kept in unsafe and unsecured places without even the most rudimentary curatorial care.

Nonetheless, the group recognized the inherent problems regarding the development of an American Indian archival program. The Indian community must first become educated about the importance of saving and caring for letters, photographs, and records. Furthermore, if the concept of archives is to gain acceptance by members of an Indian community, it is imperative that Indians be found to manage and operate them. This will not be easy because few Indians now enter fields of study such as history and librarianship that are applicable to archival work. In part, this may be due to the negative image of these professions in some Indian communities and in part to the financial difficulties experienced by Indian people engaged in prolonged courses of study. Many Indian people, deeply rooted in their home communities, find it unfeasible to embark on long, ambitious study programs. Similarly, few of them would seek out professional organizations like the Society of American Archivists and the American Association for State and Local History on their own. In many cases, they do not know about such resources; in others, they may fear ill treatment or insult should they attempt to use them.

Based on the enthusiastic and cooperative spirit that emerged from the discussions at the Tribal Archives Planning Meeting, the attendees decided to form a consortium so that the expertise of each organization could be best



Two of the first participants in the American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program in the National Anthropological Archives, Augustine Smith from Laguna Pueblo and Lorraine Bigman, a Navajo, examine Indian photographs in the archives.

utilized in developing and implementing an Indian archival program. The consortium that was formed included the following organizations: the Society of American Archivists; Cultures and Arts of Native Americans, Inc.; the American Association for State and Local History; the North American Indian Museums Association; the Committee on Library Service for American Indian People of the American Library Association; the National Archives; and the Office of Museum Programs and the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution.

Thanks to a planning grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the consortium was able to develop the framework of a two-stage archival program. The first phase, which has just been funded by the Office of Special Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities, will focus primarily on providing information to the Indian community about the importance of archives. Essentially, it will attempt to raise the awareness of tribal leaders and others to their value, while at the same time it will continue to gather information about the best means of implementing phase two, which will focus on training Indian archivists and developing tribal archives. The goal of phase one will be to disseminate basic information about archives and existing resources available to tribes. It will also try to educate tribal members about the need for archives—their function, purpose, and potential. This part of the project will begin to develop networks of individuals across the country—both Indian and non-Indian—who are informed about archives and their potential for serving as a central means of maintaining tribal cultural and historical materials.

The *American Indian Libraries Newsletter* is published periodically by the ALA OLOS Committee on Library Service for American Indian People, Virginia Mathews (Osage), Chairperson. The newsletter is sent free of charge. Newsletter editor: Dr. Cheryl Metoyer-Duran (Cherokee). Mailing list additions and address changes should be sent to Jean E. Coleman, Director, OLOS, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; (312) 944-6780. Manuscripts and letters pertaining to editorial content should be sent to Cheryl Metoyer-Duran, Ph.D., Editor, *American Indian Libraries Newsletter*, P.O. Box 111, Liberty Corner, NJ 07938.

Phase one of the program has three main components. One component, to be administrated by the Society of American Archivists, consists of six regional information sessions that will be held over a period of two years at the following cities: Norman, Oklahoma; Spokane, Washington; Denver, Colorado; Santa Fe or Albuquerque, New Mexico; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Washington, D.C. The principal lecturer at these sessions will be John A. Fleckner of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Dr. Fleckner will also develop and produce a booklet entitled *Tribal Archives: An Introduction*. The booklet, the second component of the paper, will be distributed at the information sessions; it will also be available at a nominal fee to those interested Indians who are unable to attend. The third component will be a brief slide/tape program addressing the same points to be treated in the information sessions and the booklet. To be developed by Nancy Fuller of the Office of Museum Programs at the Smithsonian, the slide/tape program is intended for use with Indian groups interested in developing archives.



James Jefferson of the Southern Utes looking at original Indian drawings in the National Anthropological Archives.

The program director for phase one is Clydia Nahwooksy, director of Cultures and Arts of Native Americans (CANNA). Assisting her will be Cheryl Metoyer-Duran. Anyone interested in learning more about this program or in attending one of the information sessions can write to the following address: Clydia Nahwooksy, Director, Cultures and Arts of Native Americans, Suite 111, 2215 W. Lindsey St., Norman, OK 73069. — HJV, Ph.D., Director, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Profile

Jim May, Ph.D.

(Cherokee)
Associate Library Director
Sonoma State University
California

Jim May (Cherokee), Ph.D., is currently the associate library director at Sonoma State University, one of the campuses of the California State University system. For two years Jim was acting library director at Sonoma State, where he has an appointment as visiting lecturer in Native American studies. Jim has also been a faculty member at the University of Denver.

When Jim was four his family moved to the country north of Sacramento, California. There he grew up in a community of Cherokees and other migrant workers, primarily from eastern Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas. He left California while in the military service. Prior to returning to California, Jim attended Harvard Business School and co-founded a publishing company in New York that produced, among other products, the *Current Index to Journals in Education* and Pandex (DIALOG's first database). Jim received a doctorate in library science from Columbia University in 1978.

In Indian affairs, May has served on the board of the Santa Rosa Indian Center, been chairman of the Members of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma Living in California, and arranged meetings between California Cherokees and candidates for office during the last Cherokee Nation elections. Jim is membership chairperson of the American Indian Library Association and as an active supporter of Indian libraries has served as consultant and evaluator for the Arizona State Library and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Currently, Jim is very active in the computer and information science field, especially microcomputers. He recently completed the Geysers Environmental Data Base project for the California Energy Commission, utilizing a microcomputer.

Jim May's greatest pride is his family: his wife Margit, son James (almost 14), and daughters Tanya (12) and Anika (7).

Special News

Report from the National Indian Education Association 1981 Conference
Prepared by Dennis Reed (Kickapoo/Hopi)

As a representative of the ALA/OLOS Library Service to American Indian People Committee, I spent two days in Portland, Oregon, at the National Indian Education (NIEA) 1981 Conference. Along with Sherry Hokanson (librarian at the Yakima Nation Library) I helped set up the ALA exhibit in the Memorial Coliseum and manned the exhibit booth to answer any questions about the work of ALA and library services to American Indian peoples. There was much activity around the booth and many NIEA participants selected our display handouts.

On the second day of the conference, Sherry Hokanson

and I gave a presentation on the various programs at the Yakima Nation Library and the Los Angeles County Library System. Along with sharing our experiences in library service to American Indian peoples, we also acquired knowledge as to what reservations need in the way of library development programs.

I would like to say that it was a very positive experience for all concerned.

*Native American Union List of
Periodicals and Newspapers Being Compiled*

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin is compiling a union list and index of Native American periodicals and newspapers based on the large collections at the society as well as campus libraries of the University of Wisconsin—Madison, public libraries throughout Wisconsin, and specialized collections around the United States and Canada. The union list is being compiled by Maureen Hady, project librarian, and Florita Louie de Irizarry, research assistant. It will be edited by James P. Danky, the society's newspapers and periodicals librarian, with a grant of \$52,214 provided by the Library Services and Construction Act. The information will be gathered for publication by next spring and will follow the same format as *Women's Periodicals and Newspapers from the 18th Century to 1981* (G. K. Hall, Winter 1981). An additional feature of the published volume will be a complete name and subject index to Native American titles published in Wisconsin and from selected areas of North America. This portion of the published volume is under the direction of Barry C. Noonan, a professional indexer. Conferences on the Native American press in Wisconsin and the nation will be held April 22-23, 1982,

and will include presentations by the editors of Native American periodicals as well as by scholars interested in the field. Other activities of the project will include a series of workshops for librarians and other interested persons in Milwaukee (April 30, 1982), Keshena (date not yet set), and Wausau (May 5, 1982) on Native American library resources. Librarians and others wishing more information about the project, or who want to contribute their holdings, should contact Danky or Hady at (608) 262-9584 or Room 225, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State St., Madison, WI 53706.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Dr. Metoyer-Duran:

I am a member of the Colville Confederated Tribe and employed as a tribal librarian in the Omak District.

The Colville Indian Reservation is located on 1.3 million acres of land in Northeastern Washington State. Our reservation is divided into 4 districts, we are developing Indian libraries in 3 districts, and eventually a 4th library will be added, if funding and operations go according to plan.

I am seeking information to help develop a successful library program. I also need information on funding resources. Any information you have on libraries or funding would be deeply appreciated. Thank you.

Lila Friedlander, Supervisor
Omak Library Resource Center
P.O. Box 1732
Omak, WA 98841

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
50 EAST HURON STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60611

Address Correction Requested

FIRST CLASS MAIL