

Prospects in First Nations Archives: Reflections based on my participation in the Tribal Archives,
Libraries and Museums Institutes and Conference programs

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Thank you for coming today. To begin I need to locate myself clearly as a Settler in born in Mississauga territory now working Siksika territory. Professionally, I am an archivist who for the past year has been working in our University Museum. For many years I worked directing a National Church archives in Toronto and then I directed a converged department of Archivists and Librarians at the University of Calgary. From 1990 through 2003 I was actively involved in both Residential Schools research, litigation and Healing and Reconciliation work. Now for the Association of Canadian Archivists I am co-chair with Jonathan Lainey, a First Nations archivist from Library and Archives Canada of the Association of Canadian Archivists Special Interest Section on Aboriginal Archives and also I am vice-chair of the Society of American Archivists, Archivists of Religious Collections Roundtable.

I want to say something about my choice of language today. There are significant differences between Canadian and American usage particularly around the appropriate use of the word "Indian". Some of this I don't fully comprehend and I know I will make mistakes and appreciate corrections. Where I refer to US examples I will be using their generally accepted terms.

The Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums Institutes and Conference processes.

<http://www.tribalconference.org/history.html>

<http://www.imls.gov/index.shtm>

This is a long term collaborative program focused on developing capacity in the Native American

heritage sector. It is particularly concerned with the professional development of Tribal archivists, librarians and museum workers and the creation of strong networks on a national and to a more limited extent international basis. Major financial support is coming from the Institute for Library and Museum Services. Some additional funding has come from the National Historic Preservation Commission which funds archival development in the US and various State agencies particularly in Arizona and Oregon. This program continues to build upon the foundation of earlier efforts to create a network of support for tribal cultural institutions and programs to articulate contemporary issues related to the development of tribal libraries, archives and museums and to encourage collaboration among tribal and non-tribal institutions.

The first phase included the award of a National Leadership Grant to a consortium of five western state library agencies and museums called the Five State American Indian Project. Major grant activities included: developing three model projects of collaboration between state agencies and related tribal agencies, disseminating a national directory of tribal libraries archives and museums; and convening a national conference of tribal libraries, archives and museums personnel. From the beginning the program has been interdisciplinary recognizing that traditional academic boundaries do not serve the needs of practitioners in local communities. Also, there has been a steady focus on preserving and renewing Native American languages as an integral part of the Tribal heritage institutions mandates. The directory, national conference and the first three projects were designed to allow diverse professionals to begin to explore collaborative projects as a solution to mutual concerns and to encourage and sustain communication among tribal and non-tribal cultural organizations and state agencies by promoting cooperative and mutually beneficial partnerships. Tribal entities from New York, Oregon and Arizona were the lead participants.

- [The Akwesasne Museum and Library](#) (Mohawk Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy)

- [Northern New York Library Network](#)
- [Tamástslikt Cultural Institute](#) (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation)
- [Oregon State Library](#)
- [Colorado River Indian Tribes Library and Archives](#)
- [Arizona State Library](#)

The second phase which is just concluding began in 2006 when the [Western Council of State Libraries](#) (WCSL) submitted a grant application to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to fund 2 National Tribal Conferences and several Immersion Institutes commencing in 2007 through 2009.

The first [2007 National Conference](#) was held in Oklahoma and attracted 560 delegates, sponsors and exhibitors. The [2008 Immersion Institutes](#) were held throughout 2008 to provide an in-depth exploration of subjects of interest to staff and volunteers of tribal museums, libraries, and archives.

Each three day Institute was preceded by an optional full-day Workshop. The topics covered included

- April 14 — How to Recognize and Prevent Threats to Your Collection
- April 15-17 — Skills and Strategies for Managing Tribal Records
- July 14 - Field Trips to Museums with Major American Indian Collections
- July 15-17 — Displaying and Caring for American Indian Objects
- August 11 — Digitization Projects From Planning to Implementation
- August 12-14 — Collection, Use, and Care of Photographs
- October 21-23 — Training for American Indian Library Services
- October 24 — Building and Managing Culturally Responsive Library Collections and Programs

The [2009 National Conference](#) was held in Portland Oregon and again was fully subscribed. I attended this conference to present a round table workshop on Contemporary Issues in Religious Archives which 46 participants including two other Canadians. There were also delegates from New Zealand at the plenary sessions. It was most interesting to experience the consistent use of a wide variety of Native American languages in the proceedings. Keynote speeches included addresses by two senior heroes of the American Indian Movement, Billy Franks, Jr. and Russell Means. A luncheon

speech by Prof. Cheryl Metoyer a Native American teaching at the Information School at the University of Washington in Seattle was focused on leadership development in the cross disciplinary professions. There is now an established Awards program that honors colleagues who have worked to develop Tribal institutions and/or who have made particular contributions to collaborative projects. A further funding allocation from ILMS for \$800,000 was announced. This will support a new series of institutes and the 2012 National Conference which is planned for Oklahoma.

In addition to myself Canadian participation included a session on the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Studies Research Tool Portal

<http://iportal.usask.ca/index.php?sid=776587933&t=index>

and the University of Northern British Columbia's innovative program described by as “Collaboration in Preserving First Nations Archives In Northern BC – A Case Study” by Kathaleigh George of the Takla First Nation and Ramona Rose, Special Collections head at UNBC. The presenters noted that they have made substantial use of Rita-Sophia Mogyrosi's 2008 MA thesis from the University of Manitoba Archives program *Coming Full Circle?: Aboriginal Archives in British Columbia in Canadian and International Perspective*. This thesis assisted the University and their First Nations partners with their work in drafting protocols for the Archives deposit arrangements which are respectful of ongoing treaty and land claims negotiations and also ensure the longer term preservation of records.

Education for Tribal Librarians and Archivists in the United States

Most of the conference attendees work in small libraries or tribal cultural centres and rely on these workshops and others offered by state and regional archives, library and museum associations for their training and professional development.

There is also a substantial effort being made to train professional archivists and librarians as well as ongoing discussions with the American Museums Association about training for museum professionals.

In addition to program emphases at the University of Washington and also at the University of Texas, The Knowledge River program at the University of Arizona is successfully graduating and placing Native American Librarians in academic libraries and also fostering a number of PhD students. As stated in their promotional material, “**Knowledge River** is a Tucson-based educational experience within the School of Information Resources and Library Science (SIRLS) that focuses on educating information professionals who have experience with and sensitivity to Hispanic and Native American populations. Knowledge River also fosters understanding of library and information issues from the perspectives of Hispanic and Native Americans and advocates for culturally sensitive library and information services to these communities.” Students receive financial assistance and enhanced career counseling services as part of the University and the American Library Association's commitment to enhanced diversity awareness.

<http://sirls.arizona.edu/KR/about>

The current context for American Archivists.

The national professional associations including the Society of American Archivists are not directly connected to the Tribal Archives, Library and Museums projects. Two past chairs of the Native American Archives Round Table, Jennifer O'Neal, Archivist at the Museum of the American Indian and David George-Shongo, Jr., Archivist of the Seneca Nation and the current vice-chair, Ally Krebs a graduate of Knowledge River and PhD candidate at the University of Washington were present and are active in this program. George-Shongo and Krebs presented a most innovative workshop on the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, “Protocols in Action: What Role would you play” which very effectively illustrated the serious challenges that First Nations Archivists and Researchers face in negotiating fair treatment by fellow professionals and appropriate access to Native American collections that are still held in mainstream institutions.

<http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>

This workshop is part of a three year dialogue that the SAA has initiated to make the Protocols widely available and to encourage buy-in from SAA members and their adoption by member institutions.

When they were introduced two years ago they were very contentious but this ongoing series of workshops is helping to build understanding and acceptance. Several American institutions have adopted the protocols as local standards. These protocols are a departure for Americans in that they are not being developed as a result of federal legislation as was the case with Museums following passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990).

<http://www.nps.gov/history/nagpra/MANDATES/25USC3001etseq.htm>

The Canadian Context for First Nations Archives development

I want to turn now to the Canadian situation. There have been modest but continuing efforts to encourage and coordinate support for First Nations archives in Canada. The Special Interest Section of the Association of Canadian Archivists is established to provide members with a forum to discuss a wide range of archival issues relating to records created by or related to Aboriginal peoples. We want to build a foundation for a permanent membership and communications infrastructure within the Canadian archival community as a whole and among Aboriginal communities and organizations. The other goals of the SISAA are to serve as an interface between the community of Canadian archivists and Aboriginal communities and organizations and to form a base of expertise, advice, and support on archival issues that can be shared with Aboriginal communities and organizations. We have published *A Guide to Aboriginal Archives* which is available on the web.

Information about publicly available First Nations holdings is available through the Archives Canada web portal. Both of these initiatives are volunteer driven with modest support from sponsoring institutions .

Library and Archives Canada's Aboriginal Resources and Services are also available on the web and

the Aboriginal Services librarian, Deborah Pelletier, a First Nations librarian provides program support. The stated objectives of this office are as follows: Aboriginal Resources and Services' main objective is to develop, promote and facilitate access to Aboriginal resources within Canada, through LAC and in partnership with Aboriginal communities and associations, government departments, educational institutions, language and cultural centres, Native Studies programs, genealogical centres, and other organizations whose interests, substantial collections or services are related to Aboriginal communities. It also seeks to identify universal issues and concerns of Aboriginal peoples, and to characterize the roles of LAC and of regional representatives in improving services in this area. As well, it wishes to prioritize the interests and needs of Aboriginal communities regarding such issues as networking, communications, advocacy, education and training, outreach services, access, jurisdiction, administration and planning. It seeks to work in partnership with Aboriginal library and archival communities in developing, promoting and facilitating access to library and information and archival services to Aboriginal peoples and in sharing the richness and diversity of these resources with all Canadians.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aboriginal/index-e.html>

Deborah and colleagues are working to implement the Recommendations of the (2003) Consultation on Aboriginal Resources and Services. This is a very tough job in this economic and political climate. The 2003 Consultation was building on the *All Our Relations* report (2001) which had documented the results of visits to 75 libraries and other First Nations cultural agencies.

Among the 24 recommendations in the report I want to note three areas that are in need of crucial attention nationally and locally:

Recommendation 3 notes:

Funding/Resources Many communities are experiencing difficulties in securing resources to establish a library. Isolation and size as well as a lack of connectivity compound the problems of competing for

dollars traditionally available from municipal, provincial and federal sources.

At the same time a recent initiative of the Canadian Council of Archives to give priority to the production of archival finding aids and digital resources with Aboriginal content and from Aboriginal communities was not fully taken up by the Provincial Councils of Archives. I believe that the reasons for this dichotomy are outlined in additional recommendations from the 2003 report:

Planning/Administration There seems to be little priority given to libraries or archival centres in communities. Few resources are dedicated to providing library or archival services to Aboriginal communities, and these are the first areas to be cut when budgets are tight.*Recommendations 5 - 6*
and also

Education, Training and Professional DevelopmentThe concerns in this area fall into three main categories: (1) the lack of trained Aboriginal professionals to work in libraries and archival centres; (2) the lack of non-Aboriginal people trained in working with Aboriginal communities; and (3) the lack of training and technical support to use the resources and services available through LAC.

Recommendations 11 - 13

In the face of these serious challenges there are models that can provide a way forward. Archives Councils particularly in Nunavut and the North West Territories are developing innovative outreach programs to local First Nations Communities. An example that has been workshopped for the Archives Society of Alberta in in Calgary is the Oral Traditions Preservation program coordinated by Erin Suliak and Norm Glowach of the NWT Archives staff. The methods used in this program are being returned to agencies such as the Tetlit Gwichin Council in order to support the longer term preservation of First Nations languages programs and other oral histories projects including the evidence presented to the Berger Commission that is located in local repositories.

<http://www.tetlitgwichin.ca/>

Also, in addition to the ongoing work of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement processes to

document the history of the schools, the Survivors of Indian Residential Schools have been at the forefront of developing new initiatives to collect and make available their legacy in support of Healing and Reconciliation. The Legacy of Hope Foundation has spearheaded three major projects. The first was *Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of Residential Schools*.

<http://www.wherearethechildren.ca>.

The Introduction to the project states

*This exhibition consists of 118 framed archival photographs, text panels, maps, original classroom texts and historical government papers that span over 125 years and that were selected from nine public and church archives. Developed with funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and in partnership with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Library and Archives Canada, this archival photo exhibition portrays the history and legacy of Canada's Residential School System. Mr. Jeff Thomas, an Iroquois artist, was the curator for *Where are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools*.*

Since being launched in 2002, WATC has been temporarily installed in venues across Canada and has achieved great success in raising awareness of the legacy of residential schools. The exhibition has also assisted in healing for many Residential School Survivors and their families and communities.

Secondly, in 2008-2009 the Foundation worked with eight Inuit survivors to create *We Were So Far Away: The Inuit experience in Residential Schools* which is now available to tour across Canada and was exhibited at Library and Archives Canada this year.

In 2009 The AHF initiated a new project called 1000 Conversations across Canada on Reconciliation. In cooperation with Native Counselling Services of Alberta who are co-sponsoring the National day of Healing and Reconciliation this effort is attempting to make stories of local healing initiatives available on the web. Story no. 10 explains how the librarian at the Native Counselling services office

is contributing to the work of healing.

In 2003 in Manitoba a group from the Long Plain First Nation near Portage la Prairie, Manitoba received funding from the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in Ottawa to establish a Residential School Museum of Canada. The Indian Residential School Museum of Canada is situated in the former Portage Indian School (now the Rufus Prince Building) on Long Plain Reserve land adjoining the city of Portage la Prairie. Resolutions of support have been passed by both the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Assembly of First Nations. The collecting mandate for this effort is the Indian Schools in Manitoba (or elsewhere). They are currently looking for any information, documents and photos relating to the following schools and the communities in which they operated including Portage Indian School (both schools: the Methodist School formed in 1880 and the more contemporary Presbyterian/United School which opened in 1911), Brandon Industrial School, Sandy Bay Indian School, Birtle Indian School, Assiniboia Residential School, Cecilia Jeffery Residential School – Kenora.

The Shingwauk Project is another significant and ongoing healing program with a strong “archival” focus. The project has become a digital repository for photo collections about many schools. These collections have been copied from public, church and private repositories and donors from the survivors' communities. The project also sponsored a study of the “missing records” from Indian Affairs for Shingwauk survivors to assist with the individual claims process.

<http://www.shingwauk.auc.ca/>

Finally and perhaps most importantly the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been tasked to provide resources for local Memorialization programs and to establish a Research Centre which is accessible to former staff, their families and communities, the general public, researcher and educators who wish to use materials in developing curriculum. The TRC is also specifically enjoined to create and maintain its own archives. An Senior archivist from Library and

Archives Canada has been seconded to this second task. The TRC has made a number of commitments which it will carry out over the course of its five year mandate. The first of these is to “Create an accurate and public historical record of the past regarding the policies and operations of the former residential schools, what happened to the children who attended them, and what former employees recall from their experiences.” Among other commitments the Commission will also “Support a commemorative initiative that will fund initiatives to pay tribute to survivors.” and will “Establish a national research centre that will be a permanent resource for all Canadians.”

Moving Forward

It is clear to me that both the American and Canadian experiences are directing us to think differently about how First Nations archives can develop as authentic and self-governing participants in the ongoing work of Healing and Reconciliation.

My ongoing participation and research suggests that

1. Research Centres both local and national will have to be multi-disciplinary. The staff and volunteers will need to develop and rely on expertise from all of the traditional disciplines librarianship, archives and museum science as well as broader communication and information technology skills.

2. There are opportunities to re-vision First Nations archives by building a new professional lexus in local languages that will clearly empower the collections with new and more appropriate meanings.

Project Naming, a partnership between Library and Archives Canada, students and their local Nunavut communities is one model we can learn from.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/inuit/index-e.html>

3. New models for core functions are emerging from the current professional practice of Native American archivists. David George-Shongo's work at the Seneca Nation Archives is a leading edge

example. He is deliberately creating culturally appropriate vocabulary for the Seneca Archives staff and students in their own language. I am circulating copies of his work with his explicit permission.

George-Shongo is also pioneering an approach to access and research that is grounded in Seneca cultural practice. For example, access to songs that are specific to particular seasons is provided only during the appropriate time of year. These protocols enhance the power of the record and provide evidence to the Seneca Nations leadership of the continuing integrity of the collections in the Archives. Shongo is also developing records managements systems based on the standard of preservation until the seventh generation.

4. Research Centres that focus on the reclaiming and development of First Nations languages will be more robust and will attract financial and other cultural and pedagogical resources to contribute to building healthy communities.

5. Training and education for Canadian First Nations information professionals, technicians and volunteers needs a long term commitment from a specific academic institution or perhaps a consortium of co-located institutions who will work in partnership with federal and provincial agencies. This commitment is crucial to developing the human resources needed to power the local and national centres for archives, libraries and museums for the next generation.

6. A National Research Centre can serve as a service and documentation hub for local First Nations community centres. It is not in my opinion a case of either/or but of both/and. The National Research Centre can be a hub to provide the technological resources to continue the work of digitizing and making collections available, can respond to institutional and individual inquiries in culturally appropriate ways and can serve as a permanent trusted repository both of

information in all formats and of original collections.

In conclusion, I want to leave you with a thought about Settlers personal responsibilities from Richard Pearce Moses, distinguished American Archivist, and champion of the Native American Protocols for Archival Materials. “Our hearts are in the right place, but maybe not our heads.”
