

CASE #1

# Archival Initiatives for the Indigenous Collections at the American Philosophical Society

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OVERVIEW:

This case study describes a series of initiatives at the American Philosophical Society Library (APS) to provide more meaningful and appropriate access to its extensive collections of Native American archival materials. These initiatives included projects to digitize and more accurately describe key parts of the collections, to assess its researcher constituencies, and to collaborate with Indigenous communities. It draws connections between these initiatives and the best practices recommendations of the [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#), and describes the development and implementation of the APS's own guidelines for identifying culturally sensitive materials within its collections through guidance from Indigenous communities. The case study concludes with findings on the approachability and accessibility of non-Native archives, the institutional impact of putting policies into place that draw from the *Protocols*, and approaches archives can take to implementing these approaches at whatever scale.

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## Introduction and Institutional Context

The American Philosophical Society (APS) Library, located in Philadelphia on the traditional lands of the Lenape people, is the oldest repository in North America of archival materials on the languages, cultures, histories, and continuing presence of Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The tradition at the APS Library of collecting materials relating to Native peoples began with Thomas Jefferson, president of the Society from 1797 to 1815, who created printed broadsides of vocabulary terms he believed would be universal to all languages, sent them to people he knew would interact with Native peoples (e.g., missionaries and military officers such as Lewis and Clark), and began compiling the lists he received back to investigate similarities among these languages as possible evidence of shared histories and “affinities” among Native nations. One of his main successors at APS, the linguist Peter Stephen du Ponceau, encouraged Jefferson and others to give more manuscripts of this kind to the APS Library for the purpose of stimulating broader research, making du Ponceau, in effect, the first archivist of Indigenous languages in the United States. As a result, APS became the chief repository and research center in North America for information on Indigenous languages of the Americas in the first half of the nineteenth century. After about a hundred years of little activity in this area, the collections were further transformed by the 1945 acquisition of the papers of the influential anthropologist Franz Boas, along with much of the core linguistic and anthropological fieldwork of many of his contemporaries and students. Since then, the collections have continued to grow with the papers of more generations of anthropologists, ethnographers, linguists, and other researchers, as well as materials produced from fieldwork sponsored by APS. The collections now consist of about 1,900 linear feet of manuscripts, photographs, and audiovisual materials relating to more than 650 Indigenous cultures of the Americas, dating from 1553 to 2017.

Many of these materials—from Jefferson’s word lists to the fieldwork manuscripts and recordings produced by salvage anthropology in the early twentieth century—were recorded under the presumption that Native cultures and languages would disappear and had to be preserved for scientific study. However, colonial expansion, land theft, and resource extraction created this presumption of disappearance, and directly enabled researchers’ drive to document these languages.

Contemporary Native communities have been using archival materials at APS and similar institutions for years, despite pervasive barriers to access such as the remoteness of holding repositories from communities where the knowledge originated, prohibitive duplication costs, scarcity of discoverable information of greater relevance to Native communities in the description of these records, and pernicious access policies at many institutions like APS that caused the exclusion of Native community-based researchers.<sup>1</sup> Archival institutions also have not traditionally given Native nations avenues to assert their intellectual property claims for these materials or to have real power in the process of determining appropriate and respectful use of information that was not shared with the intention of being made available to the public. Archivists are also coming to recognize that many Native community members’ expertise regarding materials that came from their respective communities is unique from and more extensive than the expertise that academic scholars might bring to these materials. Therefore, equitable and respectful inclusion of this expertise in the improvement of archival description is not just a matter of respect but also of practical benefit to archival institutions seeking to represent their collections more accurately, appropriately, and meaningfully.

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<sup>1</sup> By “community,” I mean to refer to sovereign Native nations as well as to individual communities that are part of a broader Indigenous people that may or may not describe themselves as a nation (e.g., Mexican indigenous communities).

In this context, the APS Library began in 2007 a series of interrelated grant projects that focused first on digital preservation and enhanced access for its Indigenous collections and then led to broader institutional momentum and commitments and to culturally responsive policies. In this case study, I will address these overall efforts as the “case” at hand, since the organic growth of interrelationships among the initiatives is key.

These initiatives at APS followed closely after the creation of the [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#), created in 2006 by “a group of nineteen Native American and non-Native American, librarians, museum curators, historians, and anthropologists . . . to identify best professional practices for culturally responsive care and use of American Indian archival materials held by non-tribal organizations.”<sup>2</sup> The *Protocols*, which was formally endorsed by the Society of American Archivists Council in August 2018 “as an external standard of the organization,”<sup>3</sup> addresses how best practices for “culturally responsive care” of Native American archival materials can be carried out in relation to nearly all areas of archival activity, including acquisition, appraisal, description, reference, outreach, preservation, and professional training. It tackles this broad range of recommendations by breaking it down into ten thematic sections, such as “Building Relationships of Mutual Respect,” “Providing Context,” and “Native American Intellectual Property Issues.” Each section begins with a concise summary of overall recommendations and principles relating to that theme, followed by a set of concrete “guidelines for actions” for non-Native archives and libraries and another set of guidelines on the same theme for Native American communities.

APS did not set out on these initiatives explicitly as a way to implement the *Protocols*, and has not implemented all aspects of it point by point. Rather, it tackled various elements of archival practice and care relating to its Indigenous collections over several years and through a series of projects focused on specific institutional needs that developed over time into an overall program. The projects described in this case study most closely relate to the sections in the *Protocols* titled “Building Relationships of Mutual Respect,” “Accessibility and Use,” “Culturally Sensitive Materials,” and “Providing Context.” I will also describe how APS developed its own *Protocols for the Treatment of Native American Materials* to provide itself with more specific institutional guidelines for procedures and policies in these areas. Developing these processes in project settings then led to growth on a more general institutional level in areas covered in other sections of the *Protocols*, especially “Native American Research Protocols” and “Reciprocal Education and Training.”

Tackling different components of culturally responsive archival activities and seeing how one area illuminates needs in other areas follows the overall trajectory of the *Protocols*. It also provides a concrete example of why the *Protocols* takes such a broad approach, and how the recommendations it puts forward are closely related and mutually supportive. For archival organizations considering how to implement the *Protocols*, this interrelatedness will hopefully make implementation less daunting and inspire confidence that any organization can take meaningful steps, whatever the scale of its Native American collections and whatever its current resources.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-council-endorsement-of-protocols-for-native-american-archival-materials>

## **Narrative**

The overall arc of initiatives described in this case study began with projects marshalled together by head of the APS Library, Martin Levitt, to advance digital preservation at the library through defined projects and to improve knowledge and reference capacity for key collection areas.

### **Getty Image Project (2007–2010)**

The first such project, running from 2007 to 2010 and funded by the Getty Foundation, focused on conducting a full survey of the APS Library's collections of photographs, drawings, and other visual images of Native American life and culture dating back to the eighteenth century, and presenting a representative sampling of these materials for online access. Over the course of this grant the project archivist, Ann Reinhardt, inventoried more than 130,000 images in hundreds of collections and digitized more than 1,100 of them, cataloging and making them available online to the general research public through the nascent APS Digital Library. She also curated a selection of the digitized images for presentation in an online exhibition.

The potential for wider public access to these images prompted the formation of a Native American Advisory Board, made up of both Native and non-Native scholars, information professionals, and cultural experts. The board reviewed the digitized images before they were placed online to 1) flag individual items that were potentially culturally sensitive or otherwise inappropriate for general public access online, 2) identify broader subject matter categories of potential cultural sensitivity that could aid archivists who may not have experience in this area in flagging items of concern, and 3) develop recommendations for procedures on how to locate, contact, and appropriately request guidance from authorities in the Indigenous communities from which the images of concern originated. The discussions initiated by this project established at the APS Library the beginnings of a commitment to developing a defined policy for restricting reproduction and publication of culturally sensitive materials.

### **Mellon Audio Project I (2008–2011)**

In 2008, a year after the start of the Getty image project, the library began a parallel three-year project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to digitize and catalog in detail a selected portion of the library's collections of audio recordings of Indigenous languages of the Americas. These recordings dated from 1928 to the early 2000s and consisted of material in nearly every audio format from wax cylinders to born-digital recordings. One of the main architects of this project was Daythal Kendall, a linguist and longtime research fellow at the library who had the most in-depth knowledge of the library's Indigenous language collections. He conducted a full survey of the audio collections based on available descriptions and identified audio relating to languages with 100 or fewer current fluent speakers as the priorities for the scope of the project period. The audio materials, totaling 1,111 hours, included a range of content, from recordings primarily made by linguists including traditional and autobiographical stories (or "texts") and word and phrase elicitation sessions, to recordings generally made by anthropologists that included singing, oral history interviews, and ceremonial gatherings.

I was hired as the project archivist to carry out the digitization and cataloging of the in-scope audio, including tracking down related documentation in APS's manuscript collections and creating detailed metadata for each collection and its component recordings. The library was aware that it knew quite

little about the full content of these recordings, as the available descriptions and documentation varied wildly in detail and extent, sometimes existed only on the recording or only in separated manuscripts or, in many cases, did not exist at all. The combination of the audio collections' formidable extent and very general metadata had left them almost unused, despite the fact that many of these collections appeared in the library's catalogs and guides for more than half a century. The project allowed me the time to create item-level records for every song, story, interview, elicitation session, or other kind of "track" on the recordings, and this cataloging detail proved to be one of the essential elements of the project for making the materials discoverable and usable to researchers who would not have heard of the APS Library otherwise.

Sadly, eight months into the project, Kendall passed away after a battle with cancer. The library hired Timothy B. Powell to follow in his footsteps as project director. Though not a linguist like Kendall, Powell brought new and related expertise essential to the project: his experience with successful collaborative humanities projects and longstanding relationships with multiple Native communities through his time at the University of Georgia and the Penn Museum. The nature of Powell's role as project director for this grant was indispensable to the ultimate success of this and subsequent projects, as his responsibilities were not consumed with internally-oriented archival tasks but with outreach, especially fostering relationships between APS and Native communities who sought greater access to their cultural heritage materials. Many of the earliest relationships that Powell established between APS and Native communities were based upon existing relationships he had with Native communities and organizations, such as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Leech Lake Tribal College, and Fond du Lac Tribal College. Most importantly, he began following up with Native researchers using APS collections, both those who came to the library and those who sent in reference requests, in order to better understand the broader context of their research and to find out how their research and use of APS materials was going months after their interactions with APS. Critically, this follow up also clarified to communities that there was a point of contact at APS with whom they could communicate on matters ranging from larger research goals to broad policy changes they sought from APS—matters that go beyond the handling of reference requests, transactional interactions, and other delimited archival operations.

Powell's outreach work during these initial years made it possible to convene a conference at APS in May 2010 called Building Bridges between Archives and Indian Communities. This two-day gathering brought together archivists from multiple Native and non-Native sister institutions, scholars in the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and Native American and Indigenous studies, and representatives (chiefs, knowledge keepers, elders, teachers, librarians and archivists, etc.) from ten Indigenous communities.

### **Mellon Audio Project II (2011–2014)**

Following the positive momentum of this first audio grant, APS received a second Mellon grant for 2011–2014. The scope of this grant included digitization of the rest of the Indigenous-related audio collections, which at project end totaled 3,200 hours of audio in 162 Indigenous languages. The broader scope of this second project reflected a key shift in understanding. Although preservation and access were among its core activities, Powell reframed it as being fundamentally an outreach project, focusing upon new connections fostered at the Building Bridges conference. The goal of the project was to show how an archives can build ongoing and responsive partnerships with Native communities in tandem with making materials more discoverable and accessible.

The four partners for this project were the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), Penobscot Nation, Tuscarora Nation, and a group of Anishinaabe communities in the United States and Canada.<sup>4</sup> These partners came through Powell's existing contacts and his active cultivation of new ones. The partners differed significantly in terms of community size, technological infrastructure, and funding resources. They also varied greatly in the kinds and quantities of materials concerning their communities that were at APS, including linguistic notebooks, English-only ethnographic manuscripts, historic photographs, medicinal information, sacred traditional knowledge, and audio recordings. Each nation's different combinations of these factors influenced their priorities for a partnership with APS, as well as which community members worked with the library. Some focused on obtaining copies of all archival materials concerning them for local community access and research, whereas others worked to support language revitalization initiatives, emphasized intellectual property concerns, or sought to identify and protect culturally sensitive materials.

The grant included funding for Powell to travel to each community once a year for three years in order to meet with community leaders (both elected and traditional), elders, knowledge keepers, clan mothers, teachers, youth, and others active in community initiatives or holding positions of authority and expertise on cultural matters. These visits began the process of giving a face to an institution with a foreboding and confusing name and were essential for beginning to establish trust and demonstrate commitment to the work.

The grant also provided funding for the four communities to send people to APS once a year as research fellows. They could send whomever they wanted and received free digital copies of archival materials. For example, the Tuscarora Nation sent elders as well as language and culture teachers from the Tuscarora Indian School to survey all Tuscarora materials at the library, and then sent two students—an undergraduate and a graduate student—for a month-long internship to scan as many manuscript and visual materials as possible. They eventually scanned all the Tuscarora materials at the library except for one lengthy linguistic card file.

In another example, a delegation of EBCI elders traveled to APS in October 2013 to evaluate materials written in the Cherokee syllabary, as well as other Cherokee materials relating to the Eastern Band communities. Archivists at APS knew that a portion of these materials were culturally sensitive and had restricted reproduction and publication of those items, even though APS had not yet completed adoption of its *Protocols*. However, these materials are in the Cherokee language with limited English-language metadata provided by white anthropologists, so it was not possible for APS to assess the true extent of sensitive content, nor did it have the cultural authority to do so.

The delegation of elders identified which materials did contain culturally sensitive (and therefore private) information, and they clarified what materials that we had identified as potentially sensitive that were *not* culturally sensitive and therefore should not be restricted. This guidance was reviewed and approved by the library and put into full effect in the subsequent months. In fall 2016, APS and EBCI also formalized the protection of these materials by signing a memorandum of understanding

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<sup>4</sup> The Anishinaabe communities included the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Leech Lake Tribal College, Fond du Lac Tribal College, and the Pimachiowin Aki project.

recognizing the guidance given by these elders and the importance of protecting these materials from reproduction and publication.<sup>5</sup>

Each community partner also provided numerous corrections of inaccurate or incomplete metadata about materials from their community and explained the significance of many materials to contemporary Indigenous contexts. They also enlightened us as to how some of these materials had been accessed years earlier for novel and innovative uses in their communities that APS was unaware of, such as the strengthening of name-giving practices or the reaffirmation by the US government of their status as a sovereign nation. As one tribe's lead researcher told me when talking about his community's past uses of APS materials, "We didn't tell you what we were working on because we didn't think you were interested." These experiences helped to form what Powell termed "Digital Knowledge Sharing"—an approach of equitable knowledge exchange and relationship-building that would come to be a key function of the library's reference and outreach activities.

### **Developing the APS *Protocols* (2011–2014)**

During this grant, APS created its own *Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials*, which were formally adopted in October 2014.<sup>6</sup> This document was composed during a three-year period by a reconstituted Native American Advisory Board, which included members of the primary Native nations with whom APS was developing partnerships, as well as Native attorneys, non-Native anthropologists and scholars, and key APS Library staff. The earlier *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* articulate a comprehensive range of best practice recommendations for the archival profession. In its section on "Culturally Sensitive Materials," it stipulates the need to "[r]espect a community's request to restrict access to and use of materials that describe and represent esoteric, ceremonial, or religious knowledge that is significant to the community." Along with this principle, it emphasizes the related need to "[c]onsult with culturally affiliated community representatives to identify those materials that are culturally sensitive and develop procedures for access to and use of those materials." The APS *Protocols* provide internal guidelines for identifying and providing protections for culturally sensitive materials found in its archival collections relating to Indigenous peoples, as well as guidelines for how to enter into consultation and agreements with the respective communities of origin for such materials. Importantly, the APS *Protocols* is a public document, even though its guidelines are directed toward the APS Library.

With the formal adoption and publication of the APS *Protocols*, I began a full survey of the collections for potentially sensitive materials. A few specific bodies of materials that tribes had raised concerns about, such as the Cherokee formulae and images of Haudenosaunee masks, were already on our radar and had functioned as useful examples in the discussions surrounding the composition of the APS *Protocols*. These materials in turn pointed to related materials in the papers of particular anthropologists, such as William Fenton and Elsie Clews Parsons, known for heavily researching and publishing on religion and ceremonial knowledge that is private information circulated according to traditional protocols in the communities where the knowledge originates and is still held. In some

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<sup>5</sup> For a fuller treatment of the experience of these partnerships, see Timothy B. Powell, "Digital Knowledge Sharing: Forging Partnerships between Scholars, Archives, and Indigenous Communities," *Museum Anthropology Review* 10, no. 2 (2016): 66–90, <https://doi.org/10.14434/10.14434/mar.v10i2.20268>.

<sup>6</sup> "The American Philosophical Society: Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 158, no. 4 (2014): 411–20, <https://www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/attachments/APS%20Protocols.pdf>.

cases, cultural authorities from Indigenous communities provided us with more specific information on what kinds of content we should flag for their review. In many cases, such as those where we did not have existing contacts with the community in question, I determined general categories of content to flag, such as non-public ceremonies, information on sacred sites, funerary practices, medicine, and other types of content listed in the *APS Protocols* and the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. Although my initial survey encompassed all manuscript, photograph, and audio collections, its main focus was to identify collections requiring more targeted, long-term research. Inevitably, new items of concern continue to emerge as a result of ongoing curatorial research, examination of materials when they are requested by researchers, more precise understanding of sensitive information for specific communities, and direct identification of sensitive materials by community authorities.

When we flag material for potential cultural sensitivity, we identify them as such in their finding aids, typically at the folder level for manuscripts or item level for audio, though in some cases at the collection level when the entire collection is potentially sensitive. This informs researchers about the nature of the restriction and provides information on whom to contact at the library for additional information. We also label the physical folder so that a researcher viewing it in the library's Reading Room has yet another notification that the item may not be reproduced, including by researcher photography. Boxes that contain restricted folders also have a spine label listing specific folders, so that staff retrieving a box for a researcher are aware of the presence of these materials and can notify the researcher.

Under the current *APS Protocols*, materials restricted due to cultural sensitivity or potential cultural sensitivity can still be viewed at the APS Library. Naturally, some communities have expressed a desire that certain materials also be restricted from viewing without permission from designated authorities. These are likely to be areas of discussion for future development of the guidelines in the *APS Protocols*, which is explicitly defined not as a fixed document, but a living one that can change over time.

Completing the audio cataloging at the end of this second Mellon grant in April 2014 required us to administer access appropriately in light of the guidelines in the *APS Protocols*. At the end of the project, there were 9,217 item-level catalog records from 260 collections, covering 3,152 hours of audio in 162 Indigenous languages. The EAD-encoded finding aids for each collection contain inventories with summary information for each item (or "track"), listed by their sequential order on the original recording media, with links out to the full MODS-based item record in the APS Digital Library, an Islandora-based digital repository. From the MODS records, researchers can access the audio in streaming form and download an .mp3 copy via an individualized login and password issued to them by request. Access is granted for free, and researchers can request access to multiple collections. For collections or audio items with restrictions, the login requirement allows us to administer appropriate access.

### **Founding of CNAIR and Digital Knowledge Sharing (2014–2018)**

The improved metadata from the audio digitization projects and outreach efforts led by Powell brought about a massive increase in use of the Indigenous collections. From 2011 to 2015, requests for these collections increased by approximately 30 to 40% each year, with requests more than doubling from 2015 to 2016. During this period, approximately two-thirds of the requests came from Indigenous individuals, organizations, or community-based projects. Prior to this period, Indigenous



requesters were in the minority. Requests from individual researchers or organizations *not* associated with an Indigenous community or a community-based project also increased during this period at roughly the same rate.

Thanks to these statistics and the compelling stories that Powell told about the results of the four pilot partnerships—all of which continue to this day—the governing body for the library created a Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR) in 2014 and committed to raising an endowment to make it a permanent component of the APS Library. CNAIR’s mission is to expand and strengthen the APS Library’s capacity to develop lasting, collaborative, and equitable relationships with Indigenous communities whose knowledge is found in its collections.

Powell served as CNAIR’s founding director from 2014 through his retirement from APS at the end of 2016. With its founding, I transitioned from audio project archivist to primary archivist for the Indigenous collections. With the end of the Mellon grants there was no longer an overarching project, but our time was full at CNAIR simply maintaining existing partnerships, responding to the quickly increasing volume of communities and community-based researchers, and maintaining follow-up with these communities and researchers. This period also marked a transition in how outreach and relationship-building opportunities emerged. Through their sheer quantity, reference inquiries became the primary way through which new contacts came about, rather than focused outreach through defined projects. In this way, the distinction between reference and outreach as separate activities or responsibilities has disappeared.

CNAIR is centered on the Digital Knowledge Sharing model that Powell developed. When we receive an inquiry from someone in an Indigenous community with which we have not been in touch, especially if they are working for a community-level entity such as a cultural center or language department, part of CNAIR’s standard reference activity is to communicate as fully as possible our present understanding of the nature and extent of materials relating to that community and language and to look for ways to provide access to materials and support their priorities. We then are able to provide free digital copies of materials that support community-based research, initiatives, and organizations.

During the Mellon audio project of 2011–2014, we worked with four partner communities. By the start of 2015, we were actively involved with fifteen Indigenous communities and had sent materials to more than 100. As of late 2018, APS, through CNAIR, has ongoing collaborative projects with more than 30 Indigenous communities, ongoing community-level contacts (e.g., cultural centers, museums, archives, elected government departments, traditional leadership, faithkeepers, schools, language programs, etc.) with nearly seventy communities from the North American Arctic to Central America, and has sent materials to more than 200 communities in the last seven years.

## **CONCLUSION**

I would like to summarize a few of the most crucial lessons we have learned in this past decade, focusing especially on basic issues of access, outreach, and scalability.

- 1. Developing culturally responsive policies is not a single initiative but an activity with multiple fronts that can be adjusted to different scales.**

Applying the *Protocols*, or insights from this or subsequent case studies, to workflows and regular processes at an archival repository is not a one-time project, but a commitment to an ongoing learning process. Of course, projects do help to develop know-how and refine procedures. The APS Library's initiatives have obviously benefited from resources made possible through grant-funded projects and broader institutional capacity to maintain staffing and infrastructure on an ongoing basis. However, archival repositories looking to develop meaningful courses of action in response to the recommendations of the *Protocols* do not have to muster up grant projects or new staff positions in order to take concrete steps.

Some of the best places for an archival repository to look for opportunities to apply guidelines in the *Protocols* are in routine archival tasks and responsibilities. The issues the *Protocols* address appear in microcosm on the day-to-day scale of individual collections and reference requests. For example, even after several years of focused initiatives in these areas, staff at CNAIR regularly have to reapply these principles and guidelines to new scenarios, such as processing a collection relating to an Indigenous community we have not yet worked with and about which we are very uninformed, handling a reference request from a new community contact and assessing why relevant collections are difficult for them to locate, or reexamining a collection that was cataloged decades ago and could use a major overhaul in description to make it more accurate and appropriate. Scenarios such as these will regularly pop up in archival repositories, and these are the optimal types of cases for learning how to translate specific guidelines in the *Protocols* into feasible local procedures and processes. The "Providing Context" section of the *Protocols* in particular provides multiple examples of small adjustments to descriptive and reference practices that are easy to put in place. For most institutions, the best place to test out these practices is to focus on a small number of high-use or prominent collections containing Indigenous materials.

## **2. Focusing on improving one archival operation relating to Indigenous collections led naturally to addressing other archival practices.**

The experience of building overall capacity at the APS Library to better serve Indigenous collections and the research public has been one of developing projects in response to needs that were illuminated by preceding projects. Digitization of Indigenous image collections for the purpose of surveying them clarified the need for a more formalized approach to identifying culturally sensitive content. Digitizing a focused set of audio material for preservation and access gave the library its first sense of the much larger latent constituency of Indigenous community-based researchers, organizations, and governments that for a long time had wanted not just better access to APS, but to work with it on a one-to-one, ongoing basis beyond individual transactions. Responding to those Indigenous constituencies required the development of internally directed but publicly available guidelines for identifying and protecting culturally sensitive materials and entering into consultation and agreements with Native nations. Fulfilling those goals required getting materials to communities more efficiently and opening channels for guidance to be received, which led to the Digital Knowledge Sharing model, which led to increased word-of-mouth, which led to a rapid rise in reference request volume, which required more improvements in metadata and user-friendly reference guides, and so on. In retrospect, the sequence of projects appears logical, but the broader takeaway is that regardless of which area of archival practice an institution focuses on in relation to its Indigenous materials, that attention will bring into focus needs in other areas.

## **3. Doing the work and learning from concrete scenarios preceded and informed the creation of local guidelines.**

An archival institution can begin implementing new approaches called for by the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* before it draws up an official policy or set of guidelines. At APS, we began carrying out approaches similar to those articulated in the *APS Protocols* before the policy was officially adopted. The experience of working with these approaches for years and learning what worked best in our institutional experience informed the writing of the *APS Protocols* by providing actual reference scenarios and collection examples for the Native American Advisory Board. Furthermore, implementing new policies and approaches does not have to be tied to specific projects, though the process of implementing them naturally clarifies the need for the kind of improved understanding or presentation of the collections that projects can bring on a larger scale.

#### **4. Giving prominence to institutional guidelines has helped to build trust.**

The visibility of the *APS Protocols* has been a major factor in the ongoing process of cultivating trust with Native communities. It clearly acknowledges “that some of the materials [in the APS collections] are culturally sensitive to indigenous tribes of the Americas” and that APS “desires to work in partnership with tribes and give tribes a voice in determining what is culturally sensitive, and to respect the sovereign right of Indian tribes to protect culturally sensitive materials.” APS is just one of many archival institutions to have developed new approaches, guidelines, or policies in response to the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. In fact, some institutions are more far-reaching in their approaches. APS is somewhat unusual, however, in its decision to publish its internal guidelines for public consideration. This publication of the policy and prominence given to it on CNAIR’s website and in public talks has greatly helped in making known that APS understands *the very existence of the issue* of culturally sensitive material in its collections. Prior to the online publication of the *APS Protocols*, some nations and community entities were hesitant to bring up the issue of restricting culturally sensitive content out of concern that this request would surprise us and lead to obstacles or slower progress on other matters, such as getting copies of materials. Some also were reluctant to bring up this issue because, as they explained, they did not look forward to the prospect of having to once again inform a non-Native organization of the existence of the issue or argue for its legitimacy.

#### **5. Restricting culturally sensitive materials has not diminished use of the collections overall.**

Restricting culturally sensitive and even potentially culturally sensitive materials has not equated to diminished use of the collections for researchers. Approximately 10% of the audio collections at APS (measured by duration) and less than 1% of the manuscript collections (measured by linear feet) relating to Indigenous peoples are currently restricted after four years of ongoing review. The majority of materials designated as potentially culturally sensitive are awaiting review by appropriate authorities in the respective communities of origin for these materials. Use of the collections overall has increased steadily alongside efforts to more accurately flag and restrict culturally sensitive and private content.

#### **6. Placing restrictions on culturally sensitive materials has benefited researchers.**

In our experience at the APS, implementing restrictions on culturally sensitive material benefits and informs researchers. Even for specific collections or subject areas that have a higher concentration of restricted content, we have found that most researchers inquiring about those materials are already aware of why certain information would be restricted or private. Moreover, most researchers have

expressed appreciation or even relief that content of concern has been flagged so that they are not exposed to it. In academic settings, researchers familiar with these issues do not want to inadvertently use sensitive material in presentations or publications, as this can be detrimental to existing or hoped-for collaborations with Indigenous communities and at odds with professional standards in their disciplines. For Indigenous researchers, coming across sensitive content can cause great distress, particularly if it is information that they want to avoid being exposed to out of respect for cultural protocols. Even without accidental exposure to sensitive information, the experience of working with some archival materials can already be a formidable emotional ordeal for many Indigenous researchers. Although an archives cannot guarantee that all sensitive content has been identified and flagged (and should be transparent about this fact), any measures that it can take to diminish the chance of additional distress is an important act of recognizing and respecting the emotional labor of many researchers' work.

**7. There was a large, unrealized, latent constituency of Indigenous community-based researchers wanting to access APS for years.**

We learned that Indigenous community-based researchers is not a cultivated constituency, but a latent one. It is made up of people who had not heard of APS but, thanks to increased word-of-mouth and new discovery methods (e.g., searching online for a grandparent's name who turned out to be on a newly-cataloged APS audio recording), immediately formed an interest in using a broad range of materials. This constituency is also made up of people who have known of APS and have been trying to use its collections but were hindered by lack of meaningful information about the contents of the collections, prohibitive costs of duplication, and, consequentially, a pervasive sense that APS was not approachable—that they could not ask it for what they needed.

**8. Accessibility requires approachability, and improving approachability is a permanent responsibility.**

Online accessibility cuts through the approachability barrier by clarifying that online materials are meant for anyone to use and by allowing users to get to materials quickly. But at APS, like most archives, materials accessible online are just a sliver of the overall collections. For the rest of the collections, even if material is discoverable, many Indigenous community-based researchers might not request it because APS, and external institutions generally, have long appeared (and actually been) unapproachable and unwelcoming. Younger generations of researchers are less likely to feel this way, but among older generations of researchers this impression is more common, as they may have experienced such impediments or expect to be impeded based on the history of these barriers. This expectation has major consequences. I have heard many first-time Indigenous users of the APS collections relate that they had been looking at the APS catalog for years, even decades, but had not asked for copies or had not come to the Library because they thought that they had to be granted permission (and wouldn't be given it), had to be academically affiliated, or just could not afford it.

To overcome this problem, many community-based experts, and sometimes even tribal government entities, believe that they have to work through a third party, often a non-Native university-based researcher or an independent consulting firm, to be granted access to APS. In some cases, an Indigenous community may in fact prefer such an arrangement, as the researcher may be geographically nearer the archives or have more time to do detailed research. Nonetheless, the archives should clarify to Indigenous communities and researchers that such arrangements are not required, though the archives can facilitate whatever arrangement the parties find to be best. In our

experience, it has been possible for such arrangements to lead to a direct relationship between APS and the Indigenous community entity—a relationship independent from and broader than the context involving the third-party researcher, but one that supports and benefits the researcher’s work as well. Although this arrangement can work and may be appropriate in some instances, in others it might not be, so it should not be presented as the required model of collaboration and relationship building.

APS does not want to project an image of unapproachability, but the image still lingers and has real effects. It is easiest to perceive this surrounding the APS because it has a manifestly elite history and is a private institution. Nonetheless, this barrier, real or perceived, lurks around all non-Native repositories, no matter how obviously public they may be. It can affect all potential research audiences, but the effect on Native researchers is especially strong.

The history of these real barriers is much longer than the current period of positive movement toward approachability, accessibility, and culturally responsive archival practices. Moreover, in some institutions actual barriers persist as policy in various forms. Even if these official barriers go away, it will take decades of work to remove the anticipation of such barriers. With this in mind, archives looking to better serve Indigenous researchers and communities should emphasize that they are welcome and that they can interact directly with the archives. It is not safe to assume that everyone knows this.

This is the broader context of accessibility that the *Protocols* stresses as well. In the “Accessibility and Use” section, it recommends that archives “[i]nvolve communities in creating welcoming and comfortable spaces for Native American visitors and rethink the need for ‘credentials’ from patrons.” Among these spaces we should include online spaces where the majority of Native researchers encounter and interact with archives, from finding aids to digital repositories to reference emails. These are additional, primary spaces where archives can continue becoming more approachable and further communicate a welcoming spirit.

***In Memory of Tim Powell***

On November 1, 2018, Tim Powell, founding director of the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, passed away after a battle with cancer. I want to dedicate to his memory both this case study, which offers just a glimpse of his impact, and the ongoing work of CNAIR, which follows in his footsteps and will show the impact of his work for years to come. His role, and how he carried out that role, was the most essential piece of the work described here. He pointed to the bigger picture beyond the tasks of improving this or that archival operation, and showed that the success of institutional initiatives ultimately rests on person-to-person interactions and ongoing relationships. As a final note, I want to emphasize a message that Tim would always come back to: that the initiatives he helped put in motion came about not because the American Philosophical Society came up with these ideas, but because Native communities have been asking these things of APS and archives in general for decades. APS, with Tim’s guidance, started learning how to listen, respond, and ask for help and correction. This learning will continue because of him.