
Voluntary Return

Repatriating a Private Collection of Native American Materials

Capstone Project Overview
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By Hope Svenson



Capstone Project

Hope Svenson, MLIS student



Capstone Sponsor

Dr. Miranda Belarde-Lewis (Zuni/Tlingit), Assistant Professor, Joe and Jill McKinstry Endowed Faculty Fellow in Native North American Indigenous Knowledge

Land

In creating this document as a graduate student at the University of Washington, I include the UW Libraries' institutional land acknowledgement:

The University of Washington acknowledges the Coast Salish peoples of this land, the land which touches the shared waters of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Puyallup, Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot nations.

Because I occupy the territory now known as Portland, Oregon, I acknowledge the generations of Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Chinook, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla, and other Indigenous peoples who have stewarded this land since time immemorial. Forcibly relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation after the ratification of the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855, the people native to this land are now members of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. Today, it is estimated that Portland has a Native population of 58,000, representing more than 380 Tribes.

Positionality

I come to this project with 25 years of academic and professional experience in contemporary arts and culture. With humility, I always try to remain aware of my privileged position as an educated, able-bodied, white, U.S.-born cisgender woman benefiting from the American settler-colonial state. The same privileges that have been afforded to me have been actively denied to others marginalized by historic and ongoing systems of oppression and dispossession. I approach my work with the intention of doing what I can to expose and dismantle these systems, working from a foundation of advocating for social and racial justice.

Project Overview

- Facilitating the return of a non-Native family's collection of Native American belongings back to Tribes
 - Documenting the ongoing process of returning the collection
 - Cataloging and digitizing archival materials in the collection
 - Outlining next steps to continue the return process after the completion of my capstone
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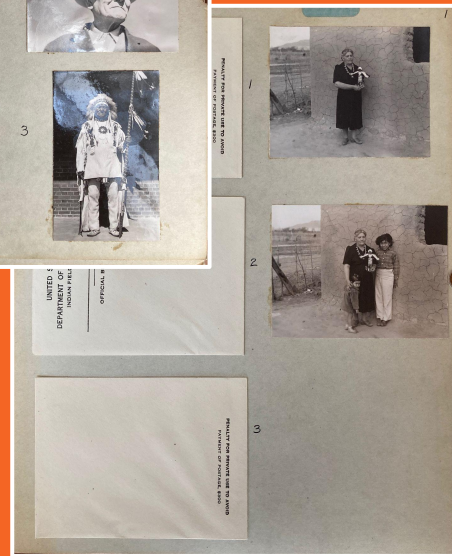
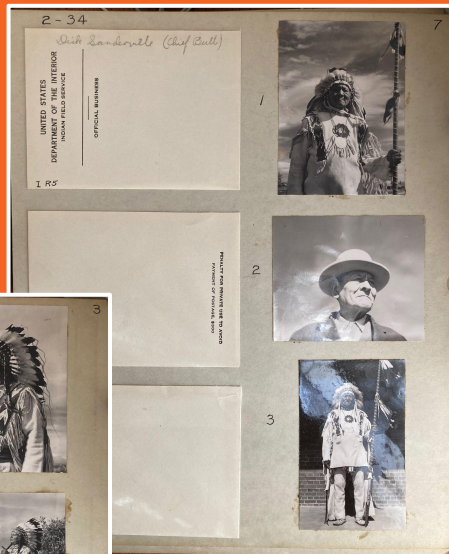
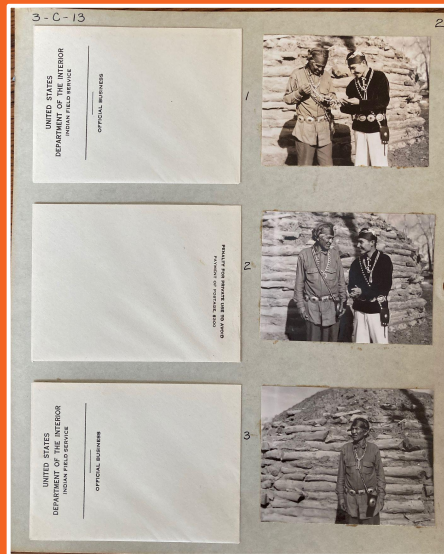
Project Background

- The Harvey Mack Sutter Collection contains 70 objects, 461 black-and-white negatives, and 276 photographs
 - Sutter was employed by the Indian Field Service from 1938 to 1942, stationed at various reservations where he took the photos and collected the items
 - Sutter was my step-grandfather
 - Sutter's youngest son, my stepfather, invited me to facilitate the return of the collection in 2022
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Selected Items from Sutter Collection



Selected Photos from Sutter Collection



Project Objectives

- Research standards and best practices for ethical return of cultural property and archival materials
 - Identify Tribal affiliation of items and photos in the Sutter Collection
 - Digitize negatives and photos
 - Contact Tribal representatives to propose return
 - Document methodological approach taken toward return of collection
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Key Actions

- Collaboration with subject matter experts to help with Tribal identification
 - Professional digitization of negatives and photos
 - Consultation with information specialists at UW for guidance
 - Completion of 6,000-word narrative essay documenting the process, linked [here](#)
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Next Steps

- Complete Tribal identification of items and photos
 - Make initial contact with Tribes
 - Send items and photos to Tribes that request their return
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Outcomes

- Tribes gain possession of belongings originating from their communities
- Tribal members will be able to reconnect family histories by having ownership of photos of their ancestors
- Possession of digitized images will allow Tribes to maintain a long-term archive

Impacts

- Inspiring more private collectors to research origins of their collections and consider returning/donating them to source communities
 - Furthering efforts toward redressing the harms of colonialism by returning and repatriating cultural property and archival materials
 - Strengthening Indigenous sovereignty by transferring ownership of cultural heritage and authority to Tribes
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Acknowledgements

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