REVITALIZING

Native American Oral Histories
at the
University of Florida

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Project Overview

For the last two years, the George A. Smathers Libraries and the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program have partnered on a Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF)-funded project to revitalize a collection of over 1,000 legacy Native American oral history materials from the late 1960s to the 1970s. This grant was a continuation of the original 1966 project, when philanthropist Doris Duke provided funding to seven academic repositories to collect and preserve the oral histories of Native communities across North America.[1] At the University of Florida, these original Duke funds helped to establish the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program in 1967.

The collection predominately represents the voices of six Indigenous southeastern communities: the Catawba Indian Nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the Mis sissippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Topics include, but are not limited to, family histories, community life, health and medicine, traditional and ecological knowledge, music,

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1   These repositories, in addition to the University of Florida, include the University of Arizona, the University of Illinois, the University of New Mexico, the University of Oklahoma, the University of South Dakota, and the University of Utah.

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Fig. 1: A snapshot of just a few of the archival boxes containing original project correspondence and transcripts.

song, and language. Unfortunately, in the decades after the project ended, relationships with the originating communities attenuated and the collection languished. A recent audit of the collection in 2020 by DDCF discovered that these materials lacked a catalog, suffered from insufficient metadata, contained transcripts that were often incomplete or inaccurate, and was in need of preservation [Fig. 1].

To address and remedy the status of the collection, the University of Florida was awarded a grant from DDCF to begin the process of revitalization: inventorying, digitizing, describing, retranscribing, and digitally sharing or repatriating the materials. At the heart of the revitalization are efforts to rebuild relationships with the Tribal communities of origin. Our grant team has been working in consultation with archival and administrative teams from the represented communities in an effort to preserve and share the materials in a culturally ethical and responsible manner. While portions of the collection will be removed from circulation at the request of our partners, many of the histories (both transcripts and audio) will be available via digital platforms. Locally, the collection will be featured on the University of Florida Digital Collections, managed by the Smathers Libraries. Nationally, the Doris Duke materials will be digitally available on a platform titled the Archive of Native American Recorded History (ANARH), managed by the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) [Fig. 2]. ANARH is a web portal that uses Mukurtu CMS, a platform that incorporates nuanced access protocols with Indigenous collections and communities in mind. Overall, the project at UF is nearly complete, with few deliverables left to finish and plans for long-term relationships with the collection's communities of origin. More information about the project and these materials can be found on the Native American Oral History Interviews LibGuide (**https:// guides.uflib.ufl.edu/NAOH/about**).

Fig. 2: The current landing page for the Archive of Native American Recorded History.

Archive of Native American Recorded History

This portal is a work in progress. It is founded on materials held in the Doris Duke Native American Oral History Collections. Materials are collaboratively curated and reciprocally managed by the repositories holding the collections and the representative Native Communities. While catalog records are publicly available, recordings are under review by Community Curation Teams to ensure that cultural best practices are observed. This is an ongoing process. New materials will be added as they become available.

Future Considerations & Enduring Lessons

The DDCF grant team decided early on that prioritizing partner needs and wishes was the most culturally responsible path forward in terms of revitalization and sharing the collection. An important realization that came from this collaborative approach was that working with Indigenous collections is not a homogenous experience; our methods for each subcollection varied considerably depending on the perspectives and decisions of each community. For example, some communities were comfortable with full public access to materials, whereas others opted to keep materials accessible to Tribal members only, and some fully opted out of retranscription or online sharing of their materials. These discussions required a rethinking on the grant team's part of many traditional librarianship notions surrounding access. When working with culturally sensitive materials, we found that open access was rarely the most appropriate or responsible option.

University of Florida Catawba Collection
CAT 063 Arzanda Sanders 8-25-1972

Mrs Arzada Sanders

Fig. 3: This image from the collection shows **Arzada Sanders**, a master pottery-maker and member of the Catawba Indian Nation, as she displays one of her works.

Describing this collection has brought to light the issues inherent in classifying Indigenous materials using Western information practices. In an attempt to indigenize aspects of the collection we have implemented several protocols. First, we updated the metadata to reflect the officially recognized Tribal names and have been updating the authority records of important Tribal community members. Second, our subject word list, derived from OCLC FAST terms, was supplemented by recommendations for Library of Congress subject heading revisions from Indigenous repositories and insight from our community partners. Finally, our student transcriptionists implemented an Indigenous style guide that followed Greg Youngming's *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples.* Moving forward, we plan to continue working with our community partners to further flesh out collection metadata, adding Traditional Knowledge labels as well as any keywords that they deem relevant for their collections.

Each community also has different goals for the future of these materials. Some have arranged visits by Samuel Proctor Oral History Program staff and hope to participate in oral history workshops in the future so that they have the tools needed to record, transcribe, and disseminate their own stories. Others are making project decisions with educational and community programming in mind, such as the Poarch Creek Band of Indians, who have used these recordings at their Evening with the Elders event series. One partner views these materials as a potential political resource, as the recordings could contain critical evidence in their petition for federal recognition. All communities are looking forward to the increased use of the collections, especially by Tribal members and families of the interviewees [Fig. 3].

Overall, this project has raised several crucial considerations for future work with both legacy and novel Indigenous collections and marginalized materials in general: What are the best procedures for evaluating Indigenous collections and reaching out to communities of origin? How can libraries, museums, and archives revitalize and repatriate Indigenous materials without repeating colonial structures? How can institutions defer to Indigenous communities to ensure that Tribal autonomy is the highest priority in future projects? It is the hope of UF's DDCF team that our Tribal relationships will evolve into sustained, mutual partnerships, and that this project—and future projects like this—will pave the way for increased representation and visibility of Native voices at the University of Florida. ⑤