

Steering a Course Set by Thomas Jefferson: New Developments in the Native American Collections at the American Philosophical Society¹

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As the director of Native American projects for the past 7 years, I have been watching distinguished scholars give talks like this one from the back row of the upper balcony. One of the things I noticed is that almost everyone, from Nobel Prize winners to astrophysicists, begins his or her talk by admitting how intimidating it is to speak to such a distinguished audience. And I can certainly second that emotion here today. So as I was writing the talk, I was trying to imagine a way to calm my anxiety and I came up with a highly questionable solution. What if, I imagined, I were talking to Thomas Jefferson? It would, no offense, make the American Philosophical Society (APS) audience seem tame by comparison. So I began by asking: How would I explain myself to Jefferson, who started the Native American collection in the late 18th century when he served simultaneously as the president of the United States *and* the president of the APS? Oh, yeah—I'm feeling calmer now!

It was an exercise that led to some interesting conclusions that I hope you and the Great Man Himself would find intriguing. When I began working at the APS in 2008, the Library had just received a major grant from the Mellon Foundation to digitize more than 1,000 hours of its Native American audio collection. The grant was originally directed by Daythal Kendall, who sadly passed away shortly after the grant began and to whom I would like to dedicate this talk. Daythal was a distinguished linguist and had envisioned the grant as a way to preserve Native American languages on the brink of extinction. I was struck, when I first arrived, by how this vision reflected Jefferson's own interests in recording and preserving Native American languages.

This point was driven home when I received a call from a reporter at *The New York Times*. She wanted to know what I thought of the

1 Read on 8 November 2014.

Unquachogs, about 20, souls
 they are constitute the Puffpa lock
 settlement in the town of Brookhaven
 S. side of Long island.
 The language they speak is a
 dialect differing a little from
 the Indians settled near South
 ampton called Shinicochs &
 also from those of Montochs
 called montochs. The three tribes
 can hardly understand each other

cow. cowson
 horse. hosses
 sheep. sheeps.
 hog. hog,
 dog. arnum
 fox. squirrutes
 squirrel. moccas.
 rabbit. mch. tux
 deer. hath
 bird. m. assas.
 conch. conconchus.
 gull. armax
 goon. hahengh.
 eagle. wequaran.

FIGURE 1. Detail of Unkechaug Word List, collected by Thomas Jefferson in 1791. Photo credit: American Philosophical Society Library.

fact that the Unkechaug tribe on Long Island was using the only existing vocabulary list collected by Jefferson himself (Figure 1) to revitalize their language, which has been considered extinct for more than 200 years. I explained that I had only been on the job for about a week and that I would have to get back to her.¹

It is both a little overwhelming and incredibly exhilarating, as the director of the new Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR), to think of yourself as overseeing a collection that began when Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark off across the continent to document Indian languages on word lists that Jefferson himself devised. With all due humility, what I want to talk about this morning is how the new Center continues to steer a course set by Jefferson and how we have, self-consciously and thoughtfully, set off in new uncharted directions.

Perhaps the most fundamentally important way that Jefferson's legacy lives on is through the work we do to preserve Native American languages. Figure 2 depicts a comparative analysis of Native American languages, written in Jefferson's own hand.² And just so you don't

Shawanee	na. i. ar	ja-lan. wa.	na-cola. Chui
Nanticoke	yaugh (hu) sauch	nap-pae. a rip. pa. u	nap-patoh quttah
Mohiccon	na. wagh na. wak	na. nun na. n'n	na. co. Teenoh ngat. Teenoh
Unquachog	yauch	napua	na-cullah
Oneida	caylei	huwe	ya-hyae
Cayuga			
Onondaga	gajen	wick	achiah
Miami	niwa niuch	na. anawa na. uchi	na. hawa na. hawach
Cherokee	na. tuh	na. salunon na. ha	na. quawna na. talley

Figure 2. “Comparative Vocabularies of Several Indian Languages,” composed by Thomas Jefferson. Photo credit: American Philosophical Society.

think I’m crazy in claiming that the Center is carrying on Jefferson’s work, consider that of the nine tribes listed here—Shawnee, Nanticoke, Mohican, Unquachog, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Miami, and Cherokee—the Center has worked with eight to preserve their languages.

Each of the names on Jefferson’s list has its own story, but I have time today to tell only one. The list of words in the Miami language was collected when Jefferson met Little Turtle, a Miami war chief, in Philadelphia in 1798 (Figure 3). At the time, Jefferson was serving as vice president to John Adams and had recently been appointed president of the APS. Little Turtle was quite a character in his own right. He was one of the most feared warriors on the western frontier, having soundly defeated the American army, led by General Josiah Harmar, in 1790. Outraged, President George Washington sent General Arthur St. Clair to subdue the uprising. Little Turtle ambushed St. Clair and defeated his troops. As the historian Donald Gaff writes, “Little Turtle destroyed the American army and destabilized the entire border between the United States and Indian Country.”³

However, after the Miami’s defeat at the Battle of Fallen Timbers by General Anthony Wayne, Little Turtle devoted himself to making peace. In 1796, he was invited to Philadelphia, where he stayed at the home of President Washington. Little Turtle returned to Philadelphia in 1798, where he met with Jefferson. Scholars believe that Little Turtle, aware of Jefferson’s interest in botany, brought him a gift of Wabash melon seeds, unknown at the time in the East.⁴ In return, Jefferson arranged for APS member Benjamin Rush to vaccinate Little Turtle



FIGURE 3. According to Harvey Lewis Carter, this lithograph of Little Turtle is based on a lost portrait by Gilbert Stuart, destroyed when the British burned Washington, D.C. in 1814. *The Life and Times of Little Turtle: First Sagamore of the Wabash* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 62–3.

against smallpox. Jefferson also arranged for Little Turtle to meet the noted linguist Comte Constantine de Volney, also an APS member. Volney used a printed form, furnished by Jefferson, to record the word list of the Miami language (Figure 4).⁵

This brief vignette reveals the complexities of Jefferson’s legacy that have been passed down to the new Center, which launched in spring 2014. On the one hand, the story emphasizes the human interaction—the reciprocal knowledge sharing—that created these documents. It is this dimension that I want to hold onto and continue to build upon. The darker side of the legacy is that this reciprocity ceased once the indigenous knowledge had been “collected.”

The reason for this, I believe, can be traced back to Jefferson’s belief that Indians were doomed to disappear and would not, therefore, become part of the new nation. As Anthony F. C. Wallace wrote in his very fine book *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans*: “Ultimately, in Jefferson’s view, the Indian nations would be either civilized and incorporated into mainstream American society or, failing this . . . ‘exterminated.’ The Jeffersonian vision of the destiny of the Americas had no place for Indians as Indians.”⁶ Similar to his fascination with mastodons, Jefferson seemed to view Indians as virtually extinct. Undoubtedly,

A Vocabulary of the Miami Language, by Volney.
It has been written in French, or the Spanish form, in the third list, & page 8
no. 10. It is as yet compared with the use of the natives & others
It is a new edition.
It must be always pronounced as in the list, not as in French

VOCABULARY of the Miami Language

Fire	<i>aké</i>	belly	<i>maige</i> or <i>mitige</i>
water	<i>épi</i>	back	
earth	<i>aké-ké</i>	side	
air		hobby	
wind	<i>aké-ké</i> (after the)	sipple	
day	<i>aké-ké</i>	slight	
sun	<i>aké-ké-ké</i>	leg	
moon	<i>aké-ké-ké</i>	foot	<i>aké</i>
star	<i>aké-ké</i>	eye	
light		skin	<i>aké</i>
darkness		hair	
day	<i>aké</i>	bone	
night	<i>aké-ké</i>	blood	<i>aké-ké</i> (the same)
heat	<i>aké-ké</i>	life	<i>aké-ké</i> or <i>aké</i>
cold	<i>aké-ké</i>	death	<i>aké-ké</i>
food	<i>aké-ké</i>	food	
cloud		meat	<i>aké</i>
log		fat	
rain	<i>aké-ké</i>	lean	
snow	<i>aké-ké</i> (in part)	bread	
hill		Indian corn	
ice	<i>aké-ké</i>	milk	
soil		egg	
dew		a house	<i>aké-ké</i>
rain-bow		the mammoth	
thunder	<i>aké-ké</i>	buffalo	<i>aké-ké</i>
lightning		elk	
yesterday		deer	<i>aké-ké</i>
to-day		moose	
to-morrow		bear	<i>aké-ké</i>
a day	<i>aké-ké</i>	wolf	
a month		panther	
a year		wild-cat	
spring		pole-cat	
summer	<i>aké-ké</i>	fox	

FIGURE 4. “Vocabulary of the Miami Indians,” composed by Comte Constantine de Volney, employing Jefferson’s printed form. Photo credit: American Philosophical Society.

Jefferson recognized indigenous languages as an important chapter in the prehistory of the land that would become the United States, but Jefferson clearly never intended for these languages to be an integral part of the living culture of “American” identity. What is so disturbing about this part of Jefferson’s legacy is that it lived on for so long.

Let me pause here to give you a brief history of the Native American collections. In my mind, there have been three distinct phases of managing the collection. The first phase included, of course, Jefferson’s work until his death in 1826. Jefferson’s vision was carried on by his brilliant protégé Stephen Peter DuPonceau, until his own death in 1844. Following this first phase, there was a century-long gap in the collecting of Native American materials.

The second great phase of the collection began in 1945 when the American Council of Learned Societies donated what were then called “The Franz Boas Collection of American Indian Linguistics.”⁷ This



FIGURE 5. Larry P. Aitken is the tribal historian of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota and an endowed chair and director of American Indian Studies at Itasca Community College. Photo credit: Frank Margeson.

acquisition led to a new wave of accessions that included some of the greatest anthropologists of the 20th century, including Frank Speck, Elsie Clews Parsons, and William Fenton.⁸ The scholarly material accessioned during the second great phase constitutes the most widely used part of the Native American collections and is the most valuable in terms of digital knowledge sharing. And yet although the scholarly value of this second phase of the Native American collections cannot be disputed, it is troubling to me that many of these brilliant scholars, including Boas himself, continued to believe they were collecting from cultures on the brink of extinction—an ideology that came to be known as *salvage anthropology*.⁹

It is important to acknowledge that this paradigm caused very real problems that continue to haunt us to this day. The ideology created a deep-seated distrust within Native communities who, of course, did not vanish. This distrust wounded all parties involved. Communities were deprived of materials that could have helped preserve their languages. Archives and museums came to be seen as places that had “stolen” indigenous culture. As a result, scholars are often unwelcome in Native cultures, and anthropology has witnessed a sharp decline of young scholars entering the field with a focus on indigenous cultures.

I want to propose that with the creation of the new Center and its commitment to what we call *digital knowledge sharing*, we are now in



FIGURE 6. Tom Belt is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation, the coordinator of the Cherokee Language Program at Western Carolina University, and a member of the CNAIR Advisory Board. Photo credit: Timothy B. Powell.

the third important phase of the Native American collections. This phase began with a conference held at the end of the first Mellon grant in 2010. The conference began with a Pipe Ceremony, performed entirely in the Ojibwe language, by Larry Aitken (Figure 5).¹⁰ It included representatives from 11 tribes, as well as leading scholars from across North America. As far as I know, it was the first time in the 270-year history of the APS that we invited Native American traditional knowledge keepers to the library as scholars rather than objects of study.

Tom Belt, a highly distinguished Cherokee elder, graciously allowed me to interview him about what it might mean for the APS and Native American communities to work in partnership and thus finally overcome the problematic legacy of salvage anthropology (Figure 6). “If it’s done properly,” Tom said, “I think that the institution will be serving its purpose as stewards of indigenous heritage. Rather than just housing data and housing artifacts, the APS could now begin to house the very kinetic energy that is the soul of our lives, and together we can create things with it. And wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing for this institution to help out in this way? I think it would give them a chance to be an intrinsic part of keeping life going as opposed to just documenting death.”¹¹

Here, Tom eloquently expresses the great hope for the third historical phase of the APS’s Native American collections. That is to say, in

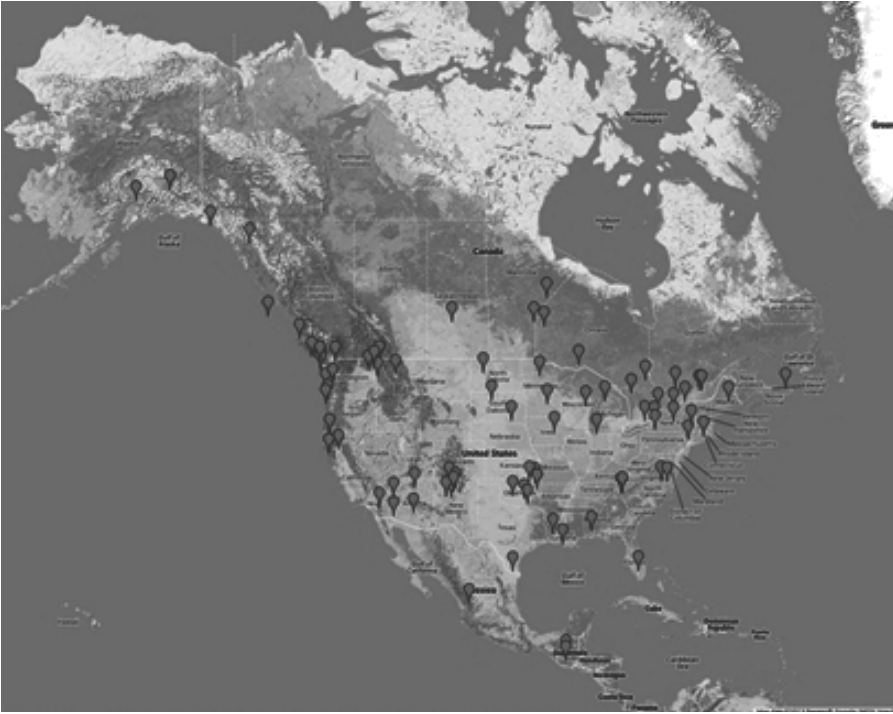


FIGURE 7. Map of the indigenous communities where CNAIR has sent digitized material between 2008–2015. Map created by Timothy B. Powell and Brian Carpenter.

the first two historical phases, the data flowed in only one direction—from Indian Country into the archive. The third phase, then, is based on the principle of reciprocity and entails a new philosophy of stewardship that takes advantage of digital technology to ensure that information flows in both directions with the goal of benefiting the archive, scholarly research, and Native communities equally.

This third phase was launched in 2011, when the APS received a second grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The funding allowed the Library to complete the digitization of the entire Native American audio collection, totaling more than 3,000 hours. The grant also allowed us to establish formal partnerships with four indigenous communities—the Tuscarora Nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Penobscot Nation, and Bands of Ojibwe in the United States and Canada—to implement a new model that we call *digital knowledge sharing*.

There are so many wonderful stories to share that, honestly, it is excruciating to leave them untold. Just to give you a sense of the scope of the digital knowledge sharing program, I want to show you an image



FIGURE 8. Anthony Wallace with Nellie Gansworth and Dan Smith. Photograph by Anthony F. C. Wallace (American Philosophical Society).

(Figure 7).¹² Each of the dots represents a Native American community to which the APS has sent digital copies of its collections in the last 6 years. In Maine, for example, the dot represents the Penobscot Nation where the last fluent speaker of the Penobscot language died in 2006. The Penobscot elder Watie Akins came to the APS and requested that we digitize a Penobscot-English dictionary written by Frank Siebert but never before published. After returning the digital files to the Penobscot, they received more than \$800,000 in funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities' Documenting Endangered Languages program and the Administration for Native Americans. The language is now being taught to everyone in the community, from newborns to K-12 students to tribal members in the retirement home, and there is very real hope that the language can be brought back from the precipice of extinction.

Working with Anishinaabe First Nations in northern central Canada, the APS digitized more than 500 photographs from the A. Irving Hallowell collection that were used by the communities as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site grant application to preserve more than 33,400 square kilometers of their ancestral homelands.¹³ The partnership with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina led us in a very different direction. What was most important to them was protecting the sacred formulas in the APS collection from dissemination. After 3 years of working with the Native American Advisory Board, headed by Robert Miller who is now an APS member, the APS just recently published the "Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials."¹⁴ All of the other 100+ dots have their own

stories, but because I am running out of time, I want to recount one particular story in greater depth—the story of how digital knowledge sharing worked in our partnership with the Tuscarora Nation.

The reason that we chose to work with the Tuscarora Nation as one of the partners is because of Tony Wallace's long relationship with the tribe. When Tony was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania in 1948, he did his fieldwork at the Tuscarora reservation near the Niagara River. Figure 8 depicts the wire recorder that Tony used to record traditional knowledge keepers such as Dan Smith, Nellie Gansworth, and Chief Clinton Rickard.¹⁵ When digital copies of these recordings were returned to the community, it was as if they came alive, and a flurry of activity related to cultural revitalization resulted. A young Tuscarora graduate student named Montgomery Hill is using Tony's tapes and other APS materials to create the first grammatical sketch of the Tuscarora language. Marianne Mithun, a linguist who has worked with the Tuscarora for many years, told me that only two fluent speakers are left, both older than 70. One of them is very reluctant to speak. However, Marianne told me that when he heard the APS recordings, he began talking as if in conversation with an old friend, and she said "he talked for days."¹⁶ In this sense, I believe we are carrying on Jefferson's vision of preserving Native languages. Where we have gone beyond his vision is in our efforts to revitalize these languages. Although it took us more than 270 years, we have, at long last, realized that the Native American communities from where these materials originated are some of our most valued and important constituencies who can also provide the APS with a great deal of important information about its own collections.

In Iroquois culture, the value of one's work is measured by whether it respects ancestors seven generations in the past and benefits those seven generations in the future. Interestingly, the APS shares this value system. One of the best examples of this work can be seen in the story of a remarkable young Tuscarora woman named Mia McKie. Mia came to the APS for a month, in 2011, as part of the Native American fellows program working with community members. She selected more than 6,000 pages of manuscripts, photographs, and audio recordings to be digitized and returned to the community, all of which was paid for by the second Mellon grant. It was a very special opportunity to get to know a brilliant young Native scholar—Mia was a sophomore at Cornell at the time—and to see the APS collection through her eyes. During our long conversations, I learned that Mia's mother was the director of the Native American Studies program at Cornell, her grandmother was the current Clan Mother of the Turtle Clan, and her great-grandfather was Chief Clinton Rickard, whom Tony Wallace had



FIGURE 9. Richard W. Hill, Sr. (right), director of Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic, presented the wampum belt to the APS on 21 October 2014. Kent Murray (left) is CNAIR Consulting Scholar and faculty at California University of Pennsylvania, and Brian Carpenter (center) is CNAIR Senior Archivist. Photo credit: American Philosophical Society.

recorded in 1948 on a wire recorder that quickly became obsolete. Now that the recordings have been digitized, Clinton Rickard's stories are being taught at the Tuscarora Elementary School.¹⁷

One day, Mia pointed out the "Charles A. Cooke Collection of Iroquois Names" and suggested we work together to transcribe it so that her grandmother could use it.¹⁸ Cooke had spent more than 50 years of his life collecting traditional Iroquois names and provided a significant amount of information about each name, including clan affiliation, linguistic analysis of the name, and a history of the people who formerly held the name. Some of the names are traced back to the 17th century.¹⁹ Mia explained that because cultural revitalization was so strong among the Six Nations of the Iroquois confederacy, there currently were not enough names to go around, since only one person can hold a name at any one time. She told us that the names were given out according to clan affiliation, and because her grandmother, Lena Rickard, was a Clan Mother, she would be able to help distribute the names.

After conferring with Brian Carpenter, Senior Archivist at CNAIR, we decided to transcribe the collection and put it into a database so that it would be fully searchable by the Clan Mothers. It took 3 years for undergraduate students at Swarthmore and California University of

Pennsylvania (under the direction of Kent Murray) to transcribe the 1,300-page document, which includes more than 6,000 names.²⁰

Recently, Brian Carpenter presented the Charles Cooke database to Rick Hill, a traditional knowledge keeper, at a conference in Six Nations, Ontario.²¹ In gratitude and by way of establishing a formal partnership with the new Center, Rick presented the APS with a wampum belt (Figure 9). Rick explained:

It's a Covenant Chain belt. The squares at either end represent our knowledge in our house and the knowledge in your house. We're connecting these two houses together The same concept was there when the Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia So think of that pathway that connects the American Philosophical Society to Six Nations Polytechnic The more we do together, the more cooperative relationships we have, that path becomes very strong, with the ideal that it will last for many generations.²²

In recognizing and keeping with the Iroquois value system, the APS database collects information about Iroquois seven generations in the past that will benefit Iroquois people seven generations in the future: additionally, we are using the language materials that Jefferson collected seven generations in the past to benefit scholars and tribes seven generations in the future. In doing so, I believe we have finally found common ground. There is reason to hope that we have, at long last, healed the enduring wound caused by Indian Removal and that these partnerships will allow Jefferson's vision to live on and grow in new directions so that the APS, tribes, scholars, and APS members such as Tony Wallace all benefit. It is an accomplishment of which I hope Mr. Jefferson himself would be proud.

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4. <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-36-02-0168-0001>

5. Carter, Harvey Lewis, *The Life and Times of Little Turtle* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 4–5.
6. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, M.A.: University of Harvard Press, 1999), 11.
7. The collection is listed in the APS catalogue as the “American Council of Learned Societies Committee on Native American Languages.”
8. John F. Freeman and Murphy D. Smith, *A Guide to Manuscripts Relating to the American Indian in the Library of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society Press, 1966), 9.
9. For a historical overview of the Boasian legacy, see Regna Darnell, *Invisible Genealogies: A History of Americanist Anthropology* (Lincoln, N.B.: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). For more on the concept of *salvage anthropology* and attempts to move past it, see James Clifford, “The Others: Beyond the ‘Salvage’ Paradigm,” *Third Text* 3, issue 6, March 1989, 73–8. I do not mean to disparage the Boasian tradition. The APS’s Native American collections have been deeply enriched by the work of Franz Boas and the papers of many of his students that reside at the APS. We would not have anything to give back to indigenous communities if it weren’t for the work of this generation or what I am calling the “second phase” of the APS’s collecting of Native American materials.
10. For videos featuring Larry Aitken and other Ojibwe elders discussing traditional knowledge, see the website *Gibagadinamaagoom* (“*To Bring to Life, to Sanction, to Give Permission*”). <http://ojibwearchive.sas.upenn.edu/>
11. Tom Belt is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and the coordinator of the Cherokee Language Program at Western Carolina University. The interview was conducted by Timothy B. Powell in 2010 and will be available on the APS’s Center for Native American and Indigenous Research website, coming soon.
12. The map was created by Timothy B. Powell. Interactive version available at <https://mapsengine.google.com/map/u/0/edit?mid=zsUBZ2C4g8Mk.kr8aLiVXp7lk>
13. For more on the Pimachiowin Aki project, see <http://www.pimachiowinaki.org/>
14. “The American Philosophical Society Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 158, no. 4, 2014.
15. The digital image is available through the APS Digital Library at <http://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/graphics%3A6471>
16. Personal communication, 29 June 2011.
17. Joanne Wienholtz and Vince Schiffert are the Tuscarora teachers who have used APS materials in their classrooms at the Tuscarora Elementary School.
18. Charles A. Cooke, “Iroquois Personal Names, 1900–1951,” Mss.497.3.c772, American Philosophical Society Library. The database will be made available on the APS’s Center for Native American and Indigenous Research website, coming soon.

19. For more on Charles A. Cooke, see Marius Barbeau, "Charles A. Cooke, Mohawk Scholar," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 96, no. 4, 22 August 1952.
20. Keat Murray, who at the time was teaching at Swarthmore College, played an integral role in working with students to transcribe the Cooke manuscript. Dr. Murray now teaches at California University of Pennsylvania.
21. Richard W. Hill, Sr. is the director of the Deyohahá:ge: Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic. He presented the wampum belt on 21 October 2014. The APS is deeply grateful for the gift of the wampum belt, which is a replica of a belt in the Penn Museum.
22. Interview with Rick Hill, conducted by Timothy B. Powell, 2 November 2015. Recorded by Diana Marsh and Lynnette Regouby for the American Philosophical Society.