

The American Philosophical Society *Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials*

INTRODUCTION

The creation of the American Philosophical Society *Protocols for the Treatment of Indigenous Materials* is the result of 3 years of close collaboration between the APS library staff, led by Librarian Martin Levitt,¹ and the APS's Native American Advisory Board, headed by Robert Miller, an enrolled member of the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma and a law professor at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University. The advisory board, whose members are listed at the end of the document, included representatives from the Tuscarora Nation, Eastern Shawnee, Pueblo of Isleta, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee Nation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Penobscot Nation, and Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne.

The APS *Protocols* have played an important role in helping the Society build stronger ties to the indigenous communities whose cultural materials are housed in the library. Beginning in 2008, the APS implemented a Digital Knowledge Sharing (DKS) initiative that established partnerships with four indigenous communities in the United States and Canada. The DKS program brought teams of Native American elders, teachers, and scholars to the APS. The teams selected materials for digitization that would strengthen ongoing language preservation and cultural revitalization projects in their communities. During the course of this process, indigenous community members helpfully identified archival materials considered to be culturally sensitive. Although the APS will keep with its tradition of allowing open access to collections (except for those accepted into the collection with restrictions), material designated by indigenous communities as culturally sensitive may not be photographed or otherwise reproduced without express permission from the communities of origin, a policy especially designed to keep sensitive material from circulating on the

1 Librarian Martin Levitt retired effective 31 December 2014.

Internet. It is a compromise that respects the traditions of the APS and our current and future Native American partners.

The APS has long been aware of culturally sensitive materials in its collection, such as the paintings of sacred ceremonies from the Pueblo of Isleta, Cherokee sacred formulas, and Iroquois masks. These materials were collected decades ago, before the current ethical standards of anthropology were put into place. The APS has always been protective of these materials as part of its mission to steward its world-class collection of indigenous materials from North and South America. The *Protocols* allowed this process to be formalized and provided a valuable opportunity to co-steward the collections with representatives from the communities where the materials originated. In doing so, the APS has helped dispel the historical distrust that resulted from the unethical collection practices of the past and forged a new bond of trust that has proven mutually beneficial to both the APS and indigenous communities. Although only a tiny percentage of the APS's large Native American collections have been designated as culturally sensitive, the Nations have been so appreciative of these efforts that they have forged long-term partnerships with the APS that have many additional benefits.

In appreciation for protecting their sacred materials, for example, indigenous community members have graciously allowed themselves to be recorded explaining the significance and identifying community members in old photographs, thus greatly enhancing the Society's knowledge of its own collections. The APS, in turn, has digitized old stories, songs, photographs, and ethnographic and linguistic materials, which it has shared with tribal communities who have used these digital materials to great effect.

One of the most successful outcomes of the DKS partnerships was the establishment, in 2014, of the new APS Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, with Dr. Timothy Powell as director and Brian Carpenter as senior archivist. It is our greatest hope that these partnerships with indigenous communities and the concept of co-stewarding the collections will continue for many years to come. As our partners from the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians taught us, the value of one's actions should be measured in terms of whether it honors those seven generations in the past and benefits those seven generations in the future. It is a value system, interestingly, that the APS shares, providing the basis for managing a collection that is more than 225 years old.

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