

Project Report

Documenting and Revitalizing Kiowa Knowledge: Material Culture Studies and Community Engagement*

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Abstract: This project report describes a research visit by a delegation from the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma to the National Museum of Natural History, the National Anthropological Archives, and the National Museum of the American Indian. The Smithsonian Institution's Recovering Voices program sponsored the visit and provided a Community Research Grant to fund the endeavor. The report summarizes the research team's activities and outlines their efforts to incorporate information gleaned during the visit into programming for members of the Kiowa community.

[Keywords: *Community, Engagement, Traditional Knowledge, Cultural Heritage, Collections-Based Research, Oklahoma, USA.* Keywords in italics are derived from the American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus, a standard nomenclature for the ethnographic disciplines.]

In August 2014, a research team from the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma visited the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) to study the museums' Kiowa collections. A Community Research Grant from the Smithsonian Institution's Recovering Voices Program funded the research trip. The grant, Documenting and Revitalizing Kiowa Knowledge: Material Culture Studies and Community Engagement, was written by the author. Recovering Voices, a collaboration between NMNH, NMAI, and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, supports efforts to document and revitalize endangered indigenous languages and knowledge systems. As part of its mandate, the program works with communities to facilitate increased access to the Smithsonian Institution's collections.

In addition to the author, the research team was comprised of six members of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma: Ms. Amie Tah-Bone, Director of the Kiowa Museum; Mr. Phil R. Dupoint, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma Historian; Mr. Dane Poolaw, a Kiowa language instructor at the University of Oklahoma; Ms. Summer Morgan, a caseworker in the Kiowa Indian Child Welfare Office; Ms. Lisa Koomsa, a bead worker; and Mr. Kiowa Taryole, a fan-maker. The intergenerational team consisted of both elders and members of a younger generation actively engaged in cultural preservation efforts. For example, Summer Morgan has been involved for several years in

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planning the tribe's annual Kiowa Kamp, a summer program designed to introduce tribal youth to Kiowa cultural beliefs and practices and Dane Poolaw has conducted Kiowa language classes for community members. The research team also included artists familiar with Kiowa material culture. Both Phil R. Dupoint and Kiowa Taryole make fans used by members of the Native American Church and Lisa Koomsa creates women's clothing, including dresses and leggings.

The research visit was conducted August 5-8, 2014. The team spent three days at the NMNH Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland. On August 5 and 7, the team viewed objects from the NMNH collection. August 6 was devoted to viewing historic photos housed in the National Anthropological Archives. The research team visited NMAI Cultural Resources Center to view objects on Friday, August 8.



Figure 1

Left to right: Amie Tah-Bone, Lisa Koomsa, Kiowa Taryole, and Summer Morgan examine a fully beaded lattice cradle (NMNH Cat. No. E358856) at the Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland.

In addition to viewing the collections, those team members affiliated with the Kiowa Museum expressed interest in learning more about museum practice and procedures during their visit to

the Smithsonian. Asked to identify highlights of the visit, Amie Tah-Bone, Director of the Kiowa Museum, identified the opportunity to learn more about the care of the collections, explaining that she and Mr. Dupoint did not have much experience, and so “that was something that we needed to take back and learn from, to apply here at the museum...we needed to see how a museum is run properly.” She went on more specifically, “I wanted to see how they handle the objects and how they had them protected” (2014a). Ms. Tah-Bone concluded that in addition to viewing the objects themselves, she appreciated the opportunity to observe how they are mounted and stored, as these are practices that she can employ at the Kiowa Museum.

Prior to the visit, the author worked closely with the members of the research team to determine the goals of the visit and to identify the materials that they wished to view. Community interests and concerns drove the selection process. Team members decided to focus on three broadly defined object categories: (1) ritual objects associated with the Native American Church, including fans and rattles, (2) clothing and beaded accessories, and (3) games and amusements. In addition, the team members expressed a desire to view archival materials in the NAA’s collection, including a collection of photographs taken by ethnologist James Mooney during his fieldwork among the Kiowa. As detailed below, these research foci were directly related to the development of educational programming targeting members of the Kiowa community.

Collections-Based Research and Community-Based Programming

Archival Materials (NAA)

Research team members expressed an intense interest in the James Mooney photograph collection at the NAA. The community members were briefed on the different collections that contained Kiowa photographs and were asked to determine which collection they would like to view first. The consensus was that they were most interested in viewing the Mooney photos. The team had initially planned to spend only half a day viewing photos in order to be able to dedicate more time to viewing objects in the NMNH collection. However, the team found the Mooney images so compelling that they quickly decided to devote the entire day to the task. Community members poured over the photos with magnifying glasses, identifying details that aided in determining the nature of the events depicted.

It quickly became evident that community knowledge has the potential to greatly expand our understanding of the events documented in the Mooney photographs. For example, through the analysis of clothing, team members determined that a number of photographs cataloged as Kiowa actually represent Southern Cheyenne or Southern Arapaho individuals. In several photos men and women in Kiowa dress appear alongside these individuals, suggesting that Mooney documented a Kiowa delegation’s visit to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation in Darlington, Indian Territory. The photos in this series have the potential to provide additional information on patterns of intertribal visitation during the reservation period.

Mr. Dupoint, a leader in the Native American Church, made several observations regarding a series of photographs documenting a Kiowa peyote meeting held near Mount Scott. He noted several details that suggest the participation of Comanche Peyotists, including the shape of the

earthen altar and the placement of firewood inside the tipi. Together, these clues underscore the level of intertribal interaction within the Mount Scott community, which was located along the border of Kiowa and Comanche territory.

Team members asked Smithsonian staff if it would be possible to obtain digital copies of the Mooney images and agreed that members of the broader Kiowa community would find the photographs engaging. Ms. Tah-Bone and Mr. Dupoint expressed interest in developing an exhibition at the Kiowa Museum based on the photographs. The photos record a wide array of subject matters and as such provide a vehicle for exploring a host of topics, including late 19th and early 20th century Kiowa material culture, religious life, and intertribal relations.

In addition to photographs, the National Anthropological Archives curates an extensive collection of manuscript materials related to the Kiowa, including over one thousand two hundred pages of field notes compiled by members of the 1935 Laboratory of Anthropology Field School among the Kiowa. Given time constraints, a decision was made to make electronic copies of these materials available to members of the research team. This would enable community members to devote maximum time to viewing the material culture and photographic collections and allow them to study the archival material at their convenience. To this end, community members received DVDs containing a PDF of the typescript of the 1935 field school notes compiled by Weston Labarre. In addition, Dane Poolaw was provided with an external drive containing high resolution scans of Kiowa language materials. These included field notes, song texts, and reports compiled by James Mooney and John Harrington.

As Mr. Poolaw explained, having access to the field notes can free community members from their previous reliance on books and articles published by academics. He noted, “A book is fine, but we need access to the raw resources from the mouths of Kiowa people back then” (communication to the author October 15, 2014). During a subsequent interview, Mr. Poolaw explained that the field notes from the Smithsonian had proved particularly useful because they contained unpublished information:

In Harrington’s notes, there were words in there that didn’t end up in his vocabulary, nor did they end up in other places. I was looking through all those words. We were looking for a word for the tipi, not the tipi, the pins that you hold the front of the tipi together with. That was the only place where I ever saw that word. [It] was in those notes. And that word, along with a few others, never made it into his vocabulary. [Poolaw 2014]

Mr. Poolaw plans to incorporate information from the field notes into the Kiowa language classes that he teaches at the University of Oklahoma, as well as the language classes that he offers for Kiowa community members.

Clothing and Beadwork (NMNH and NMAI)

One of the goals outlined in the Community Research Grant application was to document Kiowa clothing and beadwork styles and to make this information available to community members via



Figure 2

Summer Morgan and Dane Poolaw compare two pairs of men's moccasins (NMNH Cat. No. E385740 and E385876) at the Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland.

classes held at the Kiowa Museum. During the research visit, team members examined examples of women's leggings, men's moccasins, men's leggings, and women's buckskin dresses (Figure 2). In addition, they inspected numerous beaded pouches traditionally worn on women's belts, including strike-a-light pouches, awl cases, and whetstone cases. In order to document their observations, team members took notes and audio recorded their conversations. They also photographed each object in detail to record construction and decorative techniques.

Two of the team members, Ms. Koomsa and Ms. Morgan, have been involved in the creation of Kiowa women's garments. Ms. Koomsa has constructed and beaded women's leggings and buckskin dresses. Ms. Morgan has assisted her mother, Vanessa Jennings, a noted Kiowa bead worker and clothing maker, helping her cut out, sew, and bead dresses and leggings. Their careful analysis of the construction of the buckskin dresses in the NMNH collection provided insights into the objects' biographies. For example, research team members discovered indications that several of the dresses had been altered and resized. Such evidence of sustained use suggests that the objects were manufactured to meet community needs rather than for sale to non-Native collectors seeking ethnographic objects.

Several research team members expressed concerns that tribally distinctive styles of dress are currently being supplanted by intertribal styles popularized by participants in the competition powwow circuit. For example, contemporary dance outfits typically feature matching sets of



Figure 3

Left to right: Candace Greene (NMNH Collections and Archives Program), Lisa Koomsa, and Amie Tah-Bone study the beadwork on a pair of women's moccasin leggings (NMNH Cat. No. E152836, Pair 1) at the Museum Support Center in Suitland, Maryland.

beadwork, that is both the colors and designs used on the individual components of the outfit match. Prior to the research trip, team members expressed their belief that this trend was at odds with traditional Kiowa aesthetics. Analysis of articles of clothing in the NMNH and NMAI collections confirmed this belief. For example, team members studied pairs of women's boots or moccasin leggings, which community members simply refer to as leggings (Figure 3). Their examination of numerous pairs revealed that the designs placed on the right and left feet frequently differed. In examining "sets" of clothing that were collected simultaneously, team members observed that the beadwork on each individual item differed both in terms of the colors and the designs employed. Inspection of the clothing also revealed decorative practices that have fallen out of favor or disappeared. For example, the majority of the Kiowa women's leggings in the NMNH and NMAI collections were collected during the 1890s and the first quarter of the 20th century and many of them feature beaded designs located below the calf, which are not found on contemporary examples.

In addition, research team members repeatedly remarked on the degree of innovation and individuality expressed in the decorative treatment of the historic objects, contrasting this with

the rather strict “rules” that govern the decoration of contemporary Kiowa garments. Summer Morgan commented on this disjuncture:

Everything that we’ve seen here, it’s really reinforced what I’ve heard, as far as like the designs, the images, and everything that our people used on their clothes to begin with. We’ve gotten so far away from that that we’ve really limited the artistry. There was so much more. We took elements that came from nature and made it our own. We’ve gotten so, almost afraid to stray beyond what we know. That it’s become a narrow path, when there was so much more. [Morgan 2014]

Team members commented that what is considered “traditional” Kiowa clothing today is largely a product of the mid-20th century and bears little relation to the articles of dress in the NMNH and NMAI collections, which, with the exception of a few pieces, date to the last decade of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century. Research team members noted that the objects in the Smithsonian Institution’s collections have the potential to stimulate debate within the Kiowa community concerning what constitutes “traditional” Kiowa dress.

Information collected during the research visit is being utilized by the Kiowa Museum to develop a series of classes on Kiowa beadwork. The museum offered its first beadwork class in November 2014. This was an introductory class that taught students basic beadwork techniques. The class proved popular with community members and quickly filled to capacity. Future classes will address the construction and decoration of Kiowa clothing, with each class focusing on a different item of dress. The next class is scheduled to begin in February 2015 and will focus on men’s and women’s footwear.

Games (NMNH and NMAI)

Another goal of the visit was to document Kiowa games held in the NMNH and NMAI collections. To this end, the research team examined objects associated with the awl game, kickball game, and the hoop and spear game. Although it fell slightly outside the scope of the original research plan, team members also viewed the NMNH’s collection of Kiowa dolls.

Both the NMNH and NMAI collections contained awl game sets. Team members examined the painted hides that serve as “game boards,” recording their layout. They also recorded the designs on numerous sets of game sticks or dice used to determine the number of spaces a player may move during her turn. (The game was played exclusively by women.) Team members noted that there is a pressing need to identify individuals with knowledge of the awl game and to formally document the rules associated with the game and plans are currently underway to do so.

Team members also documented the construction of the balls women used to play kickball. Although the game is no longer played, community members still know the rules, which are fairly straightforward. Ms. Koomsa recounted watching her grandmother play the game with other elderly women. Community members were specifically interested in determining the materials used in making the balls and their dimensions. Fortunately, both the NMNH and NMAI collections contained examples.

During the research visit, Ms. Tah-Bone and Mr. Dupoint identified steps that the Kiowa Museum could take toward reintroducing these games within the Kiowa community. Both expressed interest in developing programs on the kickball and awl games. The museum plans to produce awl game sets and kickballs modelled on those in the NMNH and NMAI collections and to host a series of game nights to teach community members how to play the games. In a recent interview, Ms. Tah-Bone reiterated her interest in developing programming on Kiowa pastimes:

The games, that is the one thing that we are really going to start focusing on. And I am really excited about that. What we're going to do is start making awl games. And, we're going to try to do a game night. We want to make copies, not copies, but replicas of the kickball. There are so many games that we can bring back. That's definitely something that we're going to use from the trip. [Tah-Bone 2014a]

Ms. Tah-Bone explained that she sees the games as a vehicle for engaging Kiowa children. Discussing the plans for the game night programming, she stated, "We want to get kids involved in that. I think that would be the best thing, to start them young, start them early so they'll know what they're doing. They'll remember it and they can pass it on to their kids" (Tah-Bone 2014a). Similarly, Ms. Morgan expressed interest in incorporating lessons on the games into the programming for the 2015 Kiowa Kamp.

Peyote Fans and Rattles (NMNH and NMAI)

Research team members were also interested in documenting feather fans used in the context of the Peyote religion, often referred to as the Native American Church (NAC) by contemporary adherents. Mr. Dupoint is a respected roadman or ritual specialist in the NAC, who makes fans used in its worship services. Mr. Dupoint has been mentoring research team member Kiowa Taryole, as well as other aspiring Kiowa fan makers. Mr. Dupoint and Mr. Taryole inspected fans in both the NMNH and NMAI collections. Both commented on the marked difference between contemporary fans and specimens collected in the late 19th century, pointing out variations in both their construction and embellishment. For example, they noted that the earliest specimens feature wrapped beadwork rather than gourd stitch, which is the technique employed today.

In addition to examining fans, the research team also viewed several gourd rattles in the NMNH collection thought to be associated with the NAC. Mr. Dupoint was particularly struck by the fact that the gourds were painted and incised. He noted that contemporary gourds are unadorned. The analysis of the fans and gourd rattles underscored differences in the material culture associated with the NAC during its early formative period and the ritual instruments employed by contemporary Peyotists. Mr. Dupoint intends to incorporate information gleaned from studying the NMNH and NMAI collections into the ongoing instruction that he provides for younger members of the NAC.

Museums: Connecting Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

For the author, the visit underscored the ability of museum collections to function as catalysts for discussions of intangible forms of cultural property. Anthropologists have long expressed interest in indigenous forms of intangible property and the protocols governing their circulation (Lowie 1928 Jackson 2010). The topic has continued to attract attention from anthropologists, folklorists, and ethnomusicologists (Brown 2003, 2005; Seeger 2004a, 2004b; Kramer 2006; Noble 2007). Recent developments within the field of folklore highlight the topic's continued relevance. In 2013, the American Folklore Society (AFS) established the Folklore and Museum Policy and Practice Working Group, which was charged with developing "strategies to connect folklorists to the international movement to document and preserve intangible cultural heritage, and to connect this work to the tangible collections of museums" (AFS n.d.). Examination of a fan in the NMAI collection led to an in depth discussion of beadwork designs and the ways in which the rights to these designs circulate in Kiowa society.

Mr. Dupoint was particularly interested in viewing a loose fan comprised of magpie feathers in the NMAI collection (Figure 4). He identified the fan (NMAI Cat. No. 217197.000), which was created during the late 19th or early 20th century, as the work of Kiowa artist Belo Cozad. The fan held a special significance for Mr. Dupoint. As he explained, Belo Cozad taught the art of fan making to Tom Little Chief, who in turn instructed Mr. Dupoint. Viewing the fan prompted Mr. Dupoint to provide a detailed explanation of the way in which artistic knowledge is transmitted in Kiowa society. He revealed that the designs that he uses in his own beadwork originated with Belo Cozad. Cozad formally transferred the rights to these designs to Tom Little Chief, who eventually entrusted them to Mr. Dupoint. The conversation illuminated protocols governing the transmission of intellectual/ intangible property in Kiowa society.

While scholars have explored the transfer of other forms of intellectual property recognized by the Kiowa, including tipi designs and personal names (Greene 1996; Greene and Drescher 1994; Author 2011, 2014), relatively little is known about the place of beadwork designs within the Kiowa intellectual property system. Ultimately, the episode involving Mr. Dupoint underscores the power of museum objects to stimulate conversations that extend beyond the objects themselves and provide insights into indigenous systems of knowledge.

Conclusion

The Kiowa experience with the Recovering Voices program underscores the importance of museum collections and collections-based research to indigenous communities. The visit afforded the research team members a rare opportunity to examine historic Kiowa objects. Without these objects many questions regarding the techniques Kiowa artists employed in the past would be unanswerable. Furthermore, much of the information that the team documented with regard to construction and decorative techniques could not have been gleaned from studying photographs of the objects in an exhibition catalog or museum database. It was the opportunity to interact with the objects, to handle them and examine them closely, that facilitated the team



Figure 4.
Phil R. Dupoint examines a Peyote fan (NMAI Cat. No. 217197.000) made by Belo Cozad at the NMAI Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland.

members' observations. Lessons learned from the objects in the Smithsonian collections will likely influence material practices in the Kiowa community as artists seek to revive historic techniques and object types.

Research on how members of indigenous communities interact with and utilize museum collections can offer insights into the social dynamics of contemporary Native American communities. The opportunity to examine historic pieces in the Smithsonian's collections led several members of the research team to question the way in which the label "traditional" has been applied to certain styles of dress and beadwork. As information from the research visit is disseminated to the broader Kiowa community, debates regarding what constitutes "traditional" Kiowa styles of dress and adornment are likely to ensue. These debates offer the opportunity to study processes of traditionalization as they unfold (Jackson 1997, 2003). Equally of interest is the potential for the study of material culture collections to contribute to our understanding of indigenous protocols governing the transmission of intangible property. As the episode involving Mr. Dupoint and the Belo Cozad fan the NMAI collection illustrates, encounters with ethnographic objects can prompt discussions of intangible property, revealing the workings of indigenous intellectual property systems.

Viewing the collections also served as a catalyst for broader discussions about cultural revitalization efforts in the Kiowa community. Several team members indicated that these discussions were an important component of the research trip. This was a sentiment expressed in particular by the younger members of the research team and it was something on which Amie Tah-Bone reflected:

It wasn't just seeing the material, but also being here with the group. I think interacting, talking, and discussing these items. Talking on the street about how we're going to bring back the language or how we can implement new programs. It was really amazing to be with likeminded people who have the same goal as you and want to help and perpetuate our culture, because it's so beautiful and it's not something that we want lost. [Tah-Bone 2014b]

Conversations frequently turned to the sense of responsibility that the younger members felt for preserving and perpetuating the Kiowa language and cultural knowledge. As Amie Tah-Bone noted, "being here and seeing everything, I realize that there's a big burden on our backs" (2014b). However, the weight of responsibility was balanced with a sense of optimism. Summer Morgan summarized her emotions, explaining:

For me, seeing these games and everything...we can do this. We can bring our culture back. Our culture's not dead. It may be sick and it might be dying, but with enough support and enough people that have the drive to keep it going and keep it alive and make it important and make it accessible to our other people. It's possible for us to keep going. [Morgan 2014]

Reflecting back on the trip, Amie Tah-Bone, Director of the Kiowa Museum, echoed Ms. Morgan's sentiments, observing "coming on this trip, it just gave me so many ideas and hope for the future" (2014b). This enthusiasm and optimism has translated directly into programming.

Since the research team's visit to the Smithsonian in 2014, the Kiowa Tribal Museum has developed and implemented heritage initiatives to serve members of the Kiowa community. Information gleaned from the study of items of dress and other beaded objects in the NMNH and NMAI collections has formed the basis for a series of adult classes on Kiowa beadwork and clothing. Taught by Mr. Dupoint, the first class, *Beadwork for Beginners*, focused on the Gourd Stitch, a beading technique used to decorate rattles and fans as well as other objects. The class started meeting in October 2014 and the final installment of the class is scheduled for August 2015. The next class, tentatively scheduled to start in September 2015, will focus on the construction and decoration of men and women's footwear. It is the first in a series of classes that will focus on articles of clothing.

The opportunity to study objects associated with Kiowa games has also provided community members with the knowledge needed to replicate these items and to develop programming intended to revive these dormant pastimes. On June 23, 2015, the Kiowa Museum held its first official "Game Night" program. The event focused on teaching community members how to play the awl game, a Kiowa stick dice game.¹ Harvetta and Jackie Big Bow, sisters who learned how to play the game from their mother, Kiowa elder Pearl Big Bow, taught the game to an intergenerational audience that included several families with young children. Participants had the opportunity to play the game using reproduction awl game sets provided by the Kiowa Museum. In addition, two community members who attended the event brought awl game sets that had been passed down in their families. The event also provided a valuable opportunity for the Kiowa Tribal Museum to document how the game is played. Future Game Night programs will focus on different games, including the hoop and spear game and the women's kickball game.² Ms. Tah-Bone also plans to incorporate games into the programming for a culture camp that the Kiowa Museum will be offering in January 2016. While the Kiowa Museum has sponsored storytelling programs in the past, the culture camp will be its first initiative specifically designed for children and youth.³

By facilitating access to Smithsonian collections, the Recovering Voices Program seeks to support community-based programs designed to document and preserve endangered languages and associated cultural knowledge. The culture camp and other programming developed by the staff of the Kiowa Museum since the research visit in July 2014 illustrates the positive impact that the Recovering Voices initiative can have on local efforts to revitalize cultural knowledge and practices. Members of the research team continue to share with the broader Kiowa community the knowledge that they gained from their interactions with the Smithsonian collections.

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Collections Manager at the MSC, and Gina Rappaport, Head Archivist at the NAA, also offered valuable assistance. NMAI Collections Manager Victoria Cranner and her assistant Cali Martin ensured that our visit to the Cultural Resources Center was likewise productive.

Notes

1. For descriptions of the Kiowa awl game see Parsons (1929:122) and Culin (1907:124-130).
2. The Kiowa variant of the hoop and pole game is known as *qaudalauga* (wheel game). The wheel from which the game derives its name consisted of a wooden hoop decorated with rawhide lacing in an interlocking pattern. The hoop was rolled along the ground and players attempted to pierce a rawhide ring in the center of the target with arrows or spears (Merrill et al 1997:63). Kickball, or *paaite*, was a game played exclusively by females. In its most basic form, competitors took turns bouncing a buckskin ball on the top of one of their feet. The audience counted the number of times each woman kicked the ball before it fell to the ground. The winner was the woman who tallied the highest number of kicks. Another variant, referred to as *paatetsaiiai* (hopping ball game), required players to steer a predetermined course while bouncing the ball on one foot. To make the game more difficult competitors were required to navigate the course while hopping backwards (Marriott 1935). For a 19th century drawing of women playing kickball by the Kiowa artist Silver Horn, see Greene (2001:Figure 9.13).
3. Jackson (2007:40) discusses a culture camp sponsored by the Hasinai Society, a Caddo organization, situating it in the context of Woodland Indian communities' efforts to preserve their songs and dances. The culture camp being developed by the Kiowa Museum, like the one sponsored by the Hasinai Society in the neighboring Caddo community, represents an effort to preserve and perpetuate cultural practices that are viewed as endangered or threatened.

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