# Indigenizing Archival Search: Interventions in Colonial Knowledge Structures

SAA Research Forum July 30 2025

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# **Presentation Roadmap**

- 1. Introductions
  - a. Indigenous archival diaspora
  - b. What is and Why SNAC (for Indigenous contexts)?
    - i. Past edit-a-thons?
    - ii. Grant to test SNAC
- 2. Methods
  - a. FGDs & core recruitment communities
- 3. Preliminary Findings
  - a. PROBLEMS
- 4. Future Research, Get Involved, & Q&A







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#### What Needs Indigenizing?

- Accessibility to archival collections for Indigenous Tribal communities
- 2. \*To mitigate harm caused by extractive collecting processes, and descriptive practices

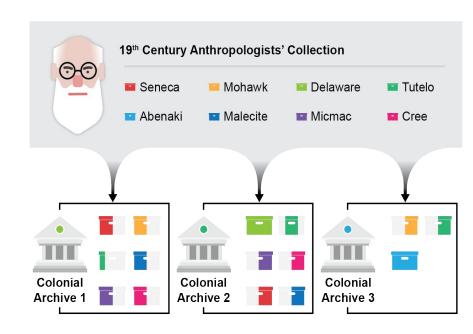




Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, First Archivists' Circle, 2006, endorsed by Society of American Archivists, 2018 <a href="https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html">https://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html</a>

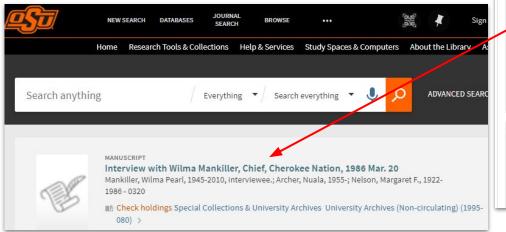
#### **Archival Contexts**

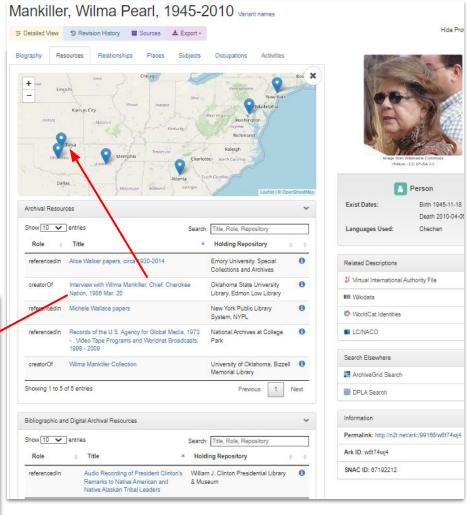
- 1. Long history of colonial knowledge extraction & "archival diaspora" (Punzalan 2014)
  - a. Reconnecting dispersed heritage/knowledge→ Communities want access to all of their materials
    - i. The 'Right to Know' (O'Neal 2015)
    - ii. Explosion of Tribal, community, digital archives Limitations of institutional subject/ libguides
- 1. Accommodates descriptive flexibility
  - b. Editors create their own authority records that fit Indigenous needs
  - c. Facilitating culturally-appropriate representation
- Focus on Indigenous people, communities, or entities represented in collections (rather than white collector or creator)
- Cooperative model: Indigenous community members and allies as editors



#### What does SNAC do?

- SNAC is an online tool that tries to facilitate pan-institutional searching and cooperative description.
- It provides a way for researchers to locate and understand the physical proximity of cultural heritage materials around the globe.

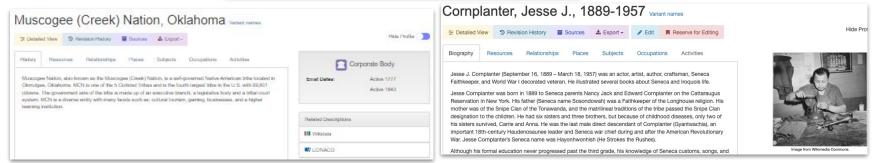




#### What is (behind) SNAC?

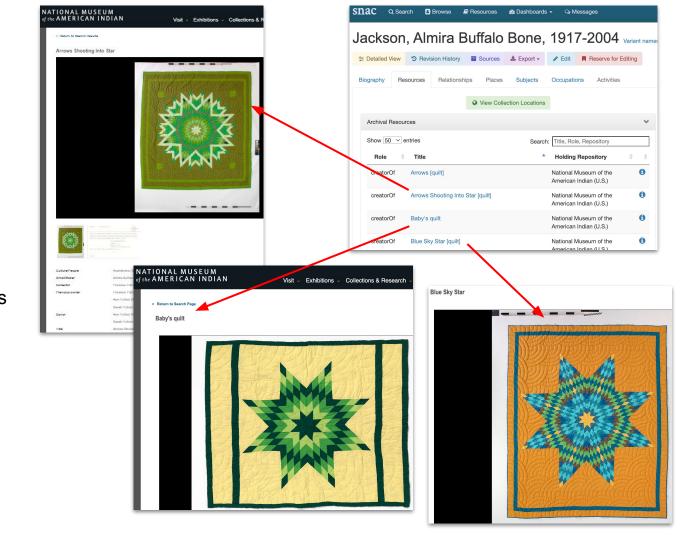
A schema knowns as **EAC-CPF** (Encoded **Archival Context for** Corporate body, Person and Family names) that created or are documented in historical resources (primary source documents), and their connections to one another in primary source documents.





#### SNAC in Action: Integrated Access to Cultural Heritage

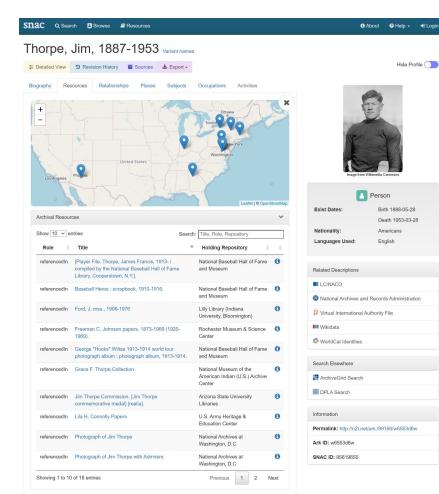
- foregrounds and emphasizes the social dimensions of cultural heritage materials in context with creators and subjects
- provides integrated access to the widest range of cultural heritage materials
- And aids discovery of these materials in archives, libraries, museums, galleries, and more, worldwide



#### **Knowledge Extraction within Archives and Museum Histories**

"Ideological vultures" (Deloria 1969) Long history of colonial knowledge extraction & "archival diaspora" (Punzalan 2014)





#### Databases and Embedded Colonial Knowledge

Collections created within contexts of assimilation and genocide (O'Neal 2014)

Colonial power and knowledge extraction (Christen and Anderson 2019; Punzalan 2014)

Legacies of the practice of salvage anthropology

Cataloging Records (Turner 2020)

Misrepresentation and bias within archival description (Gilliland 2011; Jimerson 2009)

#### Edit-a-thon 2021

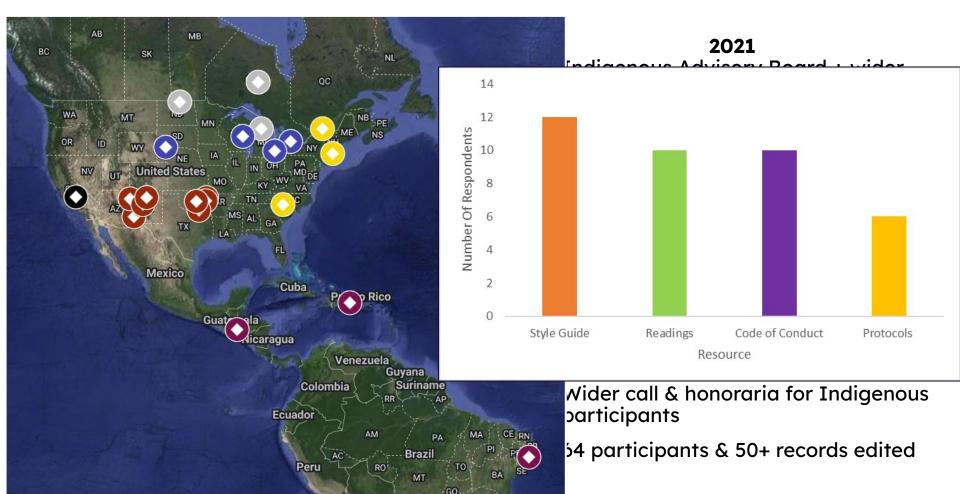
#### **Core Team**

Lydia Curliss (University of Maryland iSchool, Nipmuc) | Irene Gates (New School) | Dina Herbert (NARA) | Diana Marsh (University of Maryland iSchool) | Katherine Meyers Satriano (Peabody Museum at Harvard) | Jerry Simmons (NARA)

## **Indigenous Advisory Board**

Margaret Bruchac (Abenaki), University of Pennsylvania | Stephen Curley (Diné), National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition | Taylor Gibson (Cayuga), Gāhsronih | Eric Hemenway (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians) | Keahiahi Long, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa | Melissa Stoner (Diné), University of California at Berkeley

#### SNAC Edit-a-thon 2020/2021



# **Indigenous Participants in 2021 Editathon**

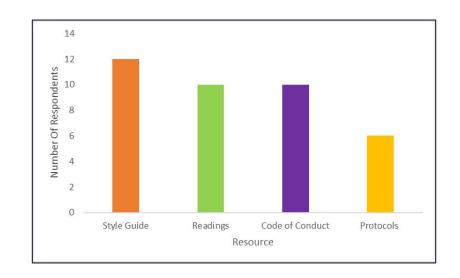
In total, we had **18 Indigenous** participants who represented the following Indigenous Nations and Communities:

Anishinaabel Anishinaabea, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Cherokeel Chiricahua Apachel Choctaw Nation of Oklahomal Gaduwagi I Catawbal Kahnawake Mohawki Natchez Nation | Navajo Nation | Nipmuc | Oglala Lakota| Ojibway - Walpole Island First Nation | Oneida Nation of Wisconsin | Pipil Nahuatl| Pueblo of Isleta| Pueblo of Pojoaque| Shawnee| Six Nations of the Grand River Territory | Tabajara | Taino Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewal Yokuts - Tule River Indian Tribe



# Over the two days, **around 64 participants** (out of 137 initial registrants) **18 of whom were Indigenous** worked on at least **50 entities**

- Increased # of Indigenous records and Editor (and Editor Allies)
- Greater awareness of SNAC for Indigenous communities across the US
- Reusable model for pre-event protocols & post-event peer review process
- Creation of Editorial Guide for describing Indigenous Entities in SNAC
  - This was the most self-reported used document by Participants



#### **Research Questions:**

- 1. How can aggregating tools improve how Native and Indigenous community researchers locate archival records (in culturally appropriate ways)?
  - a. How can colonial archives and Indigenous communities work together to design and implement new tools while centering communities in the design and implementation process?
  - b. What are the specific affordances of SNAC for locating collections dispersed in colonial archives across North America, and what technical infrastructures, cultural protocols, and educational initiatives are needed for this purpose?
  - c. How can SNAC or other archival search tools facilitate repatriation and stewardship for Indigenous communities?

#### **Methods: Focus Groups**

- 1. **Focus groups/ testing SNAC with Indigenous users** from range of perspectives
  - a. Indigenous participants in the 2021 Edit-a-thon (who know SNAC well)
  - b. Indigenous Library Archive and Museum (LAM) professionals
  - c. Indigenous students within Library & Information Science (LIS) and other related disciplines
  - d. Indigenous community members (who have never used SNAC)
- \*SNAC & Archives Policy Work: Indigenous Description Group (IDG) & cultural-technical upgrades
- 3. Community outreach:
  - a. Emphasize role SNAC can play in facilitating repatriation by helping to locate relevant archival records, especially in service of Indian Boarding School & repatriation efforts
  - b. Community-based presentations
- **4. Developing Indigenous SNAC Training**, SNACSchool and/or other educational modules/webinars/training material
  - ^ IMLS grant Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program ^ (https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-252311-ols-22)

Methods: Approach & Analysis

#### **Analysis Informed by:**

- Kovach Indigenous Methodologies 2021
- Charmaz Constructing Grounded Theory 2014

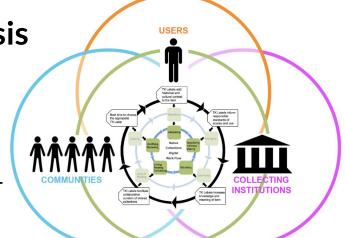
#### **Cultural-Technical Methods:**

- Indigenous evaluation frameworks.
- Relational metadata and linked data innovations.

**Guiding Values**: Patience, reciprocity, expansiveness, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Community engagement  $\rightarrow$  Technical development  $\rightarrow$  Archival transformation.

Reciprocal Curation Workflow, Local Contexts



**Focus Groups IMLS Preliminary Findings** 

# Findings: Incommensurate Representational Systems (with direct impacts to visibility/access)

Indigenous versus western ways of knowing→

#### Description:

Homogenization of enormous knowledge, space, time diversity, but oversimplification

Specific but incorrect/inconsistent representation, e.g. multiple different spellings of individuals and Indigenous communities

Erasure, misidentification, offensive terminology

 Identification of Indigenous records (Example: not listing records according to person as subject terms, rather than the photographer)

#### **Imposed Access Barriers**

Violence in space contact "imposed scarcity requires Indigenous peoples to maintain contact with non-Indigenous entities" (Meissner 2019, p. 133)

Institutional gatekeeping (Linebaugh, et al., 2022)

- Scheduling an appointment
- Showing identification
- Security
- Surveillance

### Findings: Imposed Access Barriers

"The western way is to become an authority on something and then your words are as an expert and are 'as so.' It's built to be a lot of individual work, but there needs to be more collaborative work."

Indigenous versus western ways of knowing→

- Ownership
- Anthropological extraction versus community safekeeping

#### Institutional policies and practices

- Power Dynamics
   Institutional gatekeeping (Linebaugh, et al., 2022)

   Scheduling an appointment
   Showing identification

  - Security
  - Surveillance

#### **SNAC Problems & Improvements:**

"If this is going to be a platform that's accessible for people not getting a PhD - That part (searching) should be more user-friendly. It looks very dry; difficult. Researchers are used to that search process but not everyone is. Easy to see that for them, and requires a lot of work."

- Increase Indigenous archival material on SNAC
- Improved metadata
- Indigenous place names
- Indigenous languages
- Adherence to cultural protocols
- Improved search structure
- Accessible training materials
- Educational initiatives

#### **Possible Usefulness to Communities:**

Repatriation

"I think that could really help improve-especially for those of us who are doing repatriation work in tracking down stuff, because it's really like a treasure hunt. It's kind of ridiculous." j

Language Revitalization

"Western information systems can be co-opted for language revitalization."

Genealogy Research

"A genealogical perspective... is oftentimes how our community members are trying to engage with these different tools (with crowdsourcing components)."

#### **Archival Futures:**

#### Collaboration

"I just think that this SNAC work and the work with community members is gonna be really impactful. And I'm so excited. I'm glad we have so many good people working on it and within it, And I'm super excited. I really hope that it starts impacting NAGPRA and their databases more."

- Accountability
- Truth-telling

"So for us, it's about telling bigger stories and representing a more true history."

#### **Editorial Guide**

- Editorial Guide created as a collaborative effort between the project team, advisory board and Indigenous edit-a-thon participants
- Post edit-a-thon—standardized and is open on the SNAC platform for feedback: https://portal.snaccooperative.org/node/595
- Notes concerns around describing
   Indigenous entities & general issues around
   Indigenous description in archival records &
   SNAC
  - Participant feedback showed concerns over adding things like "location," "nationality" to records; Challenges around describing Indigenous languages



## **Ongoing SNAC Limitations & Future Work**

#### **Concerns about SNAC content:**

 SNAC is a discovery tool, but it also directs users to colonial institutional content (e.g., Inappropriate or culturally-sensitive material available online)

#### Reaching out & further involving communities:

Goal of project to move authority to communities

#### **Culturo-Technical limitations:**

- Variant name searching
- Desire to search by community autonym:
  - Searching by subject terms?
  - Centering community names as entities
  - contemporary political entities [e.g. fed recognized tribes vs. historical communities

# Limitations of SNAC for Indigenous description/representation:

- Incorporating best practices for description/representation of Native and Indigenous content in archives and in SNAC specifically
- Indigenous naming practices (how to align RDA naming standards with Indigenous names)
- Only scratching surface of Indigenous placenames, subjects, and many other fields

# Other feedback which could be addressed in future work:

- SNAC front page how to make more welcoming for Indigenous community users (inclusion of BIPOC figures)
- Better representation of Indigenous figures throughout the platform
- Creating educational material on commonly misunderstood types of Indigenous materials
- Translating entire SNAC records into Indigenous languages

- 1) Applied Indigenous eva environmental scanning
- 2) Cultural-technical upg
- 3) Exemplary archival aut T/FN
- 4) Community-based coll and/or other linked data
- **5)** Documentation on the workflows
- **6)** Indigenous archival sea instructor training
- 7) Co-designed, collabora archives and mutual bene







# July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025 August 6th-7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

# Indigenous Research and Reference

SNAC Research and Reference is intended for those wanting to learn how to use SNAC for conducting their own research, or those who provide reference and want to up their game! Attendees will get an overview of SNAC's website and search functions and will learn how it can help them with their archival research goals.

# Indigenous Create and Edit

SNAC Create and Edit is a multimodule course geared towards those interested in editing in SNAC. Some archival research training or experience is recommended before taking this class, and previously recorded sessions and PDFs of slide decks are available to revisit steps and refresh your memory.

# Indigenous SNAC Edit-a-thon!

required.

This edit-a-thon is open to ALL SNAGE Editors and Trainers, but will have an Indigenous focus and objectives related to some technical and editorial project that have occurred, such as expansion and implementations of thesauri and controlled concepts modules. No preserve participating in an edit-ator working with the SNAC platform is



#### **Connect with Us?**

• New website:

https://snac.ischool.umd.edu/ Email
us: IndigenizeSNAC@umd.edu

FaceBook Page: IndigenizeSNAC

• Email: IndigenizeSNAC@umd.edu

Will be at ATALM & more!

#### Indigenous SNAC Event Series:

Register Here:

https://portal.snaccooperative.o rg/node/521 COLLEGE OF INFORMATION STUDIES

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#### **New Hires**

- 1. Project Manager
- 2. PostDoc
- 3. Technical Team Developer

If you are interested or know someone who might be, let us know!



& Ph.D. opportunities with us!

#### **MASTERS OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION STUDIES**

#IndigenousUMD In 2023-2024 we launched of the

engaged in Indigenous research

studies classes, and navigating

change.

COLLEGE OF INFORMATION The MLIS degree prepares students to lead information institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums. innovate to meet the information needs of individuals and

communities, and advocate for information literacy, accessibility, and inclusivity. Core courses provide students with foundational knowledge in information behavior, information services, management, and technology.

- ALA-accredited
- . #2 in USA MLIS Online (TheBestSchools.org) . #4 in USA - MLIS Program Overall (U.S. News & World
- Join the Center for Archival Futures, which explores ethical
- approaches to collections and data stewardship Undertake Archives & Digital Curation, or Diversity &
- Inclusion Specializations
- Add a Certificate in Museum Scholarship & Material Culture Online, In-Person, & Hybrid options!
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The Indigenous Futures Lab is a hub of Indigenous research, evaluation, and relationship-building where we center Indigenous knowledges to build futures of co-flourishing.

- . Join a one-of-a-kind hub that centers Indigenous knowledges, arts, and leadership to shape thriving futures through cutting-edge research, evaluation, and community
- Develop expertise in Indigenous research methodologies, evaluation, creative expression, and community engagement to empower tribal communities and advance
- Collaborate with a dynamic interdisciplinary team of Indigenous scholars, leaders, artists, and allies to cocreate transformative scholarship, activism, and community-driven initiatives
- Integrate Indigenous arts, media, and cultural practices into innovative research, advocacy, and community partnerships that celebrate Indigenous lifeways and promote self-determination
- Access unparalleled resources, mentorship, and networks to launch your career in Indigenous-focused research, evaluation, policy, advocacy, arts, and beyond while making a real impact in the field

#### Thank You to all of the IndigenizeSNAC Collaborators!

Amanda Sorensen, PhD Candidate, Lydia Curliss (Nipmuc), PhD Candidate

**Volunteer editors in startup events** (approx. 18 hours of their time!) + **Event Day SNAC Editor Support/ Peer Reviewers:** Jodi Berkowitz, Kit Messick, Becca Morgan, Betts Coup

Edit-a-thon Project Team & Continued Collaborators: Irene Gates, Katherine Meyers Satriano, Dina Herbert, Jerry Simmons

Indigenous Advisory Board: Angie Bain (Lower Nicola Indian Band), Tiffany Chavis (Lumbee), Alan Corbiere (m'Chigeeng First Nation), Taylor Gibson (Cayuga), Eric Hemenway (Odawa), Keahiahi Long (Hawaiian), Veronica Pipestem (Otoe-Missouria), Melissa Stoner (Diné/Navajo Nation), Selena Ortega-Chiolero (Chickaloon), Kimberly Toney (Hassanamisco Band of Nipmuc)

Consultants: Veronica Pipestem, Tiffany Chavis, Brandon Castle, Rachel Bickel, Scotty Beland, Abigail Hardy

SNAC Executive Director: Jerry Simmons, newly appointed and longtime SNAC trainer. Former Directors Daniel Pitti and Susan Pyzynski

**UVA Collaborators:** John Unsworth, John Hott

**Catalyst Team:** Scotty Beland, Rachel Bickel, Abigail Hardy (Monican Indian Nation), Rebecca Ridge (Chicana)

**Indigenous Description Group Members:** Rose Buchanan, Tiffany Chavis, River Freemont, Mik Hamilton, Worthy Martin, Jerrid Miller, Eden Orelove, Veronica Pipestem, August Brave Heart Sanchez, Ugoma Smoke

Smithsonian & local colleagues who offered invaluable feedback: Eden Orelove, Nancy Kennedy, Rachel Menyuk, Nathan Sowry, Emily Moazami, Michael Pahn, Joshua Bell, Gina Rappaport, Katherine Christensen, Katherine Crowe, Katie Duvall, Adam Gray, Caitlin Haynes, Kate Madison, Daisy Njoku, Mark White, Gabrielle Sanchez, Pam Wintle

**Other UMD collaborators:** Maura Matvey, Susan Winter, Polly O'Rourke, CAFe teams, Stephanie Sapienza & Emily Frazier at MITH, participants in the smaller Fall in-person edit-a-thon

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# Thank you!

Amanda Sorensen, PhD Candidate, Lydia Curliss (Nipmuc), PhD Candidate

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