

Weaving a New Shared Authority
The Akwesasne Museum and Community Collaboration

Preserving Cultural Heritage, 1970-2012

by

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ABSTRACT

Museums reflect power relations in society. Centuries of tradition dictate that museum professionals through years of study have more knowledge about the past and culture than the communities they present and serve. As mausoleums of intellect, museums developed cultures that are resistant to relinquishing any authority to the public. The long history of museums as the authority over the past led to the alienation and exclusion of many groups from museums, particular indigenous communities. Since the 1970s, many Native groups across the United States established their own museums in response to the exclusion of their voices in mainstream institutions. As establishments preserving cultural material, tradition, and history, tribal museums are recreating the meaning of "museum," presenting a model of cooperation and inclusion of community members to the museum process unprecedented in other institutions. In a changing world, many scholars and professionals call for a sharing of authority in museum spaces in order to engage the public in new ways, yet many cultural institutions struggle to find a way to negotiate the traditional model of a museum while working with communities. Conversely, the practice of power sharing present in Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) tradition shaped a museum culture capable of collaboration with their community. Focusing on the Akwesasne Museum as a case study, this dissertation argues that the ability for a museum to share authority of the past with its community is dependent on the history and framework of the culture of the institution, its recognition of the importance of place to informing the museum, and the use of cultural symbols to encourage collaboration. At its core, this dissertation concerns issues of authority, power, and ownership over the past in museum spaces.

Dedicated to my parents, Thomas and Kathleen Heisinger

For always believing in my dreams.

And to my husband, Michael Siekman

Thanks for celebrating every little milestone.

And in memory of Walter “Bob” Heisinger

Thank you for all the prayers and laughter.

Wish you were here for this.

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PREFACE

WEAVING A MUSEUM

In mid-March, the crisp, cold air still lingers over New York State's North Country. The ice on the St. Lawrence River has finally broken, signaling the start of spring even though a dusting of snow still lingers on the ground. This is Akwesasne, *the land where the partridge drums*, where New York State, Ontario and Quebec unite. This is Mohawk country. This is home to the Akwesasne Museum. The landscape informs the museum and its holdings as much as it informs Akwesasne identity. Cultural symbols like baskets, wampum belts, and lacrosse sticks fill the museum and the community with a sense of common meaning and purpose. Like many Indigenous museums across the North American continent, the Akwesasne Museum reflects Native national identity through a medium adopted from the western museum tradition. In the hands of Indigenous communities, however, the museum transforms from a place that often claims authority over the representation of history and culture into a welcoming space for entire community to participate in its practices

I remember my first trip to *the land where the partridge drums*, named for the sound the St. Lawrence River makes while covered in ice. Arriving in mid-March, winter continued to linger even as the grass started to peak through the dwindling white fluffy cover on the ground. The biting cold in the air remained as the sun crept higher into the clear blue sky. The landscape appeared to be at the center of a battle between winter and spring causing a confusion of the senses as part of me yearned for a hot bowl of soup and another wanted to bask in the sun. As I explored the area further, I noticed many other elements to the landscape that seemed simultaneously at odds and in harmony with another. The hand-painted signs dotting the roadway reminded drivers that they had entered "Mohawk

Country” battled for attention next to billboard advertisements welcoming guests to the casino. Exploring the neighborhoods, a driver could very easily be in the United States one minute and Canada the next, without every knowing they had crossed a border, yet it all remained one place; Akwesasne. After passing by separate buildings supporting two different tribal governments, I concluded that this was most certainly a place of complexity with a long history of compromise and multiple authorities. The long-standing tradition of balancing power relations maintained by the Mohawks and the Haudenosaunee inform nearly all aspects of politics, life, and culture. The influence of shared authority and power relations present at Akwesasne led to questioning of how this tradition informed the practices at the museum within the community at the Akwesasne Cultural Center and Museum.

Prior to my first visit to Akwesasne, I spent five years as an undergraduate and graduate student exploring the representations of American Indians in museums. Through my studies, I noted the concern of many scholars from different disciplines about the relationship between museums and Native nations. Most scholars focused on issues of repatriation, sacred objects, or interpretations of Native cultures in mainstream museums.¹ These conversations are certainly important and make a difference in forcing museums to recognize their own practices. Scholarship noted a movement away from museums as “cabinets of curiosity” which exploited Native cultures, to institutions including a Native

¹ As an example of these issues, see Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

voice in their interpretations.² Most scholars credited this to Native communities demanding the inclusion of their own voices in interpretations, yet only a few began to recognize the intriguingly quick development of tribal museums across the United States.³ Amidst conventional museum practices, tribally owned and operated museums and cultural institutions emerged in vast numbers over the course of the last thirty years. This work began out of a curiosity to understand why Native nations developed museums and if they resembled mainstream museums or some new kind of institution.

My interests in museums and interpretations of history for the public led me to Arizona State University's Public History program. Serving as a negotiator between the academic world and the public was intriguing. My studies as a public historian gave me a better understanding of the considerations of museum professionals when developing exhibitions. I quickly developed a greater theoretical base for my studies of American Indian representations in museums. It became clear that the changes in interpretations of American Indian groups in museums in the United States linked to the greater movement for museums to collaborate with minority groups in general as many began to make attempts at collaboration with the cultures they represented in their institutions.⁴ Imperative to museum practice when working with communities is the idea that public historians should act as

² Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008); Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

³ John Joseph Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007); Gwyneira Isaac, *Mediating Knowledges: Origins of a Zuni Tribal Museum* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007); Jennifer Marie Karson, "Bringing It Home: Instituting Culture, Claiming History, and Managing Change in a Plateau Tribal Museum" (Ph.D. Diss. Austin: The University of Texas, 2007).

⁴ Andrea Witcomb, *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003).

negotiators rather than authorities. Furthermore, museum professionals should strive for self-reflection when developing narratives presented to a diverse audience. Drawing connections across my studies led me to question why more museums were falling short of their collaboration goals.⁵

This study seeks to address the rapid growth of tribal museums across the country through the lens of museums collaborating or sharing their authority with the communities they serve. Other studies on tribal museums examine the utilization of Euro-American methods to preserving history and culture in the museum space with traditional methods of past-keeping. Focusing on concepts of shared authority, the Akwesasne Museum reveals a tribal museum changing the structure of the Euro-American museum model to enhance collaboration with its community, a model mainstream institutions could duplicate. Highlighting important cultural symbols and reflecting an organic sense of place, the Akwesasne Museum developed meaningful ways to collaborate with its diverse community that connects the past, present, and future. As a historian, I am interested in change over time, but as a public historian, I am concerned about the relevance of the past to the present. Public practitioners and museum professionals need to remain aware of how the public chooses to interact with the past.⁶ Addressing the issue of shared authority in mainstream and tribal museums highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the practice and identifies a shift in the meaning of museums. This work focuses on a tribal museum, namely the Akwesasne Museum, to demonstrate a greater point about the opportunities of mainstream

⁵ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁶ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

museums and cultural institutions of all kinds to improve the way they work with the communities they serve.

This research began with a question and an email on September 12, 2008. In considering why a steady growth of tribal museums across the United State occurred in the last thirty years, I sent an email to museums run by Native nations across the country asking if they would be willing to help with my project. Two hours later, I received a cheerful response from Sue Ellen Herne the program manager at the Akwesasne Museum. Within a few days, we exchanged a number of emails, documents, and soon after phone calls. Her willingness to share material and ideas with me, a person she had never met, was surprising.

During my first trip to the museum on a bright and cold March day, Sue Ellen took nearly the entire day to tour me through the museum, answer my questions, and pull material for me. Following my first walk around the museum, she asked my thoughts about the placement of a music player toward the front of the exhibit. After listening to my opinion that it would be better pulled out a bit more for better visibility, she immediate asked for my assistance in moving it. It was my first personal experience with the type of shared authority practiced at the museum.

Over the course of four years visiting and communicating with the people at the museum, it is clear that sharing authority comes naturally. It is remarkable that even someone from outside the community can feel a connection and a sense of inclusion in the museum. This ability to connect different worldviews at once demonstrates the power of the type of shared authority practiced at the Akwesasne Museum. Tribal museums have evolve the museum experience into a powerful tool for community building in a changing world, a concept that can demonstrate to mainstream museums that there is a new and more meaningful way to share authority.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

ESTABLISHING A SHARED AUTHORITY

*Haudenosaunee wampum belts retain powerful diplomatic purpose. They symbolized the forging of an alliance, a promise to communicate and continue to nurture an equal friendship. Wampum does not just hold meaning for the past, but are reminders to continue those partnerships in the present.*⁷

Museums by their nature allow viewers of exhibitions to encounter a wide variety of “others.” One can confront the strange habits of communities of the past in a history museum, explore the bizarre unknown fringes of the universe at a science museum, or examine animals from faraway lands at a natural history museum. In both the past and the present, these institutions promise the wonder of learning about new ideas, places, and beings different and separate from oneself. For much of their collective history, western museums presented the world through a myopic lens that favored a white male elite point of view, casting every other person or idea into the category of “other.”⁸ Many museums in an effort to gain knowledge or collect curiosities exploited the subaltern cultures and communities they strove to represent, often ignoring the ability of the people to speak for themselves or determine what they wanted on display. In America, museum professionals often dismissed American Indian Nations in a deliberate neglect of minority communities on display in museums. Even as more museums make efforts to collaborate with the

⁷ See William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 224-239.

⁸ Edward Said made the concept of “the other” a well-known point of analysis to which he argues that understanding configurations of power in societies is key to fully understanding culture. The term relates to how a culture views its members in comparison to one different from itself, and furthermore how that leads to the marginalization of some in unequal power relations. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

communities they represent, there continues to be a disconnection in understanding how that cooperation or sharing of authority within the museum space should work.

The influences of postmodernism and “new social history,” which acknowledged that there are multiple versions of the past, have inevitably affected public cultural and learning institutions.⁹ Acknowledging that historians are not *the* authority on the past and instead offer *interpretations* of the past, cultural institutions have transformed from “mausoleums” to “forums” that engage the public in shared conversations about the past.¹⁰ This is not merely a shift in practice driven by changes within the academic world. Societal changes that emphasize an individualized approach to learning and a further recognition of the many voices in history drive the transformation in expectations by museum visitors. Some scholars term this effort to engage and work with communities “shared authority,” recognizing that working with the public compels museum professionals to relinquish some control over the interpretation of objects and cultures. Others argue that a full sharing of authority within a museum space is impossible due to the inherent nature of the institution that always retains the final say over interpretation in the hands of the museum. The public’s changing expectations may force a new examination of the capacity for shared authority in museums.

⁹ Introduced to United States historiography in the 1960s, the “new social history” drew its influence from the Annales School in France which encouraged the study of ordinary people and social structures within societies. This approach encouraged a movement away from studying history only important individuals which often presented elitist versions of the past. Instead, it argues that studying history “from the bottom up,” provides a means to analyze social structures, long-term trends, and the experiences of marginalized groups.

¹⁰ See Andrea Witcomb, *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (London: Routledge, 2003) particularly the chapter entitled “‘A Place for all of us?’ Museums and Communities” pp. 79-99.

In his introduction to *A Shared Authority* (1990), Michael Frisch discusses the importance of making the past relevant to the present and argues that the most compelling function of public history is “a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority.”¹¹ Negotiating authority in museums is a difficult task that some scholars claim is unachievable simply because museums were not designed to share intellectual authority with communities.¹² The argument is that no matter the degree museum professionals communicate with members of the community, the institutional bureaucracy ultimately decides how to interpret and present their findings, creating a power imbalance. In 2011, Frisch reiterated his earlier description of shared authority, emphasizing that it should not be something that museums do; rather it should always exist in public institutions as something that just “is.”¹³ This dissertation argues that the ability for a museum to share authority of the past with its community is dependent on the history and framework of the culture of the institution, its recognition of the importance of place in informing the museum, and the use of cultural symbols to encourage collaboration. At its core, this argument concerns issues of authority, power, and ownership of the past in museum spaces. The historical significance presented here is that shared authority is not unattainable in museums simply because the institution is not designed for power sharing; rather, its ability to collaborate with the public rests in its acknowledgement of the place that informs its meaning and its utilization of

¹¹ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx.

¹² Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 101.

¹³ Michael Frisch, “From *A Shared Authority* to the Digital Kitchen, and Back,” *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, eds., (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for the Arts and Heritage, 2011), 127.

cultural material to connect the community with a sense of living heritage.¹⁴ Providing a space where the community feels it can actively unite with other community members, which makes the past relevant to the present in tangible ways, creates an institution that the public desires to be involved in as a representation of what is important to them.

Shared authority can also be described as “collaboration” since the concept emphasizes two parties working together to reach an end result. Perhaps more appropriately the term “power sharing” evokes collaboration between two parties that may be of traditionally unequal positions of power and that the one with a higher authority is relinquishing some power to the other. Examining the practices in tribal museums reveals that power sharing is taking place in these institutions. The museum holds the authority to present what it chooses within the institution yet shares its interpretive power with the community by inviting them to provide information and opinions regarding exhibitions. Many tribal museums, such as the Akwesasne Museum, are redefining the role of a museum in its community, but that is not to say that the model is limited to tribal institutions alone. In a world increasingly focused on the individual, museums must develop a means for every member of a community to find something to connect to during his or her visit while fostering the sense of community and highlighting what makes that particular community unique. All museums have an identifiable public or community. This study argues that the Akwesasne Museum has a set of practices that employ specific tools allowing them to

¹⁴ For more on the importance of place, see Joseph A. Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999); Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

connect with their audience. Museums of any type could apply these practices by using similar tools to find new ways to connect with their audiences.

Museums owned and operated by American Indian communities challenge the traditional meaning of museums by developing a new model of shared authority, thereby, suggesting that a balanced approach to working with communities is possible. Since the 1970s, the number of tribal museums across the United States has grown substantially, marking a desire of Native communities to create places for the representation and preservation of culture on their own terms. When George H.J. Abrams conducted a survey of tribal museums in 2002, he presents that there were approximately two hundred and thirty-six tribal museums in operation when he published his results. Of the seventy-four respondents to his survey, forty-seven listed their founding year with only eight opened before 1970. The Akwesasne Museum participated in this survey and was among the twelve institutions opened in the 1970s. More than half the respondents reported their founding date later than 1980. Based on the respondents to Abram's survey, the number of tribal museums in the country more than doubled after 1970.¹⁵

Built to serve the needs of the community and evoke a sense of place, institutions such as the Akwesasne Museum demonstrate an advanced method of sharing authority. Reinventing the meaning of "museum" the Akwesasne museum follows a standard institutional model for museums while closely working with and for the community's needs. The Iroquois (or Haudenosaunee), of which the Akwesasne Mohawks are a part, maintain a centuries-old tradition of compromise and authority sharing through the League of Nations

¹⁵ George H.J. Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2004), 6.

and the Covenant Chain.¹⁶ The League of Nations created social and cultural bonds between the Iroquois nations, while the Covenant Chain was a complex network of diplomatic alliances between the Iroquois and their Native and European neighbors. These methods are not without faults, but it is explicit that the Akwesasne Museum developed from a long history of striving to work with others that manifests in its approach to working with the community it serves. The Akwesasne museum is a revealing case study to explore how the indigenization and redefinition of the museum provides a means to share authority in a balanced and power-equalizing manner. Moreover, the strong emphasis on place and cultural symbols in the museum demonstrates that when institutions allow the environment in which they reside to drive their exhibitions and programming, the result is a higher degree of shared authority between the museum and the community.¹⁷

The practices at the Akwesasne Museum demonstrate the importance of a sense of place and utilization of cultural symbols that inform life at Akwesasne as elements that make cooperation between the museum and the community possible. Examining this particular museum alongside more mainstream museum's efforts to share authority with the communities they represent will demonstrate how cultural thinking informs the effectiveness of outreach within institutions. Weaving together scholarship from a number of disciplines, including ethnohistory, public history, museum studies, Mohawk ethnographies, and cultural anthropology, offers a holistic view of the elements that contribute to the Akwesasne Museum's ability to effectively share authority. Each provides a different understanding of

¹⁶ See Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984).

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz describes the importance of cultural symbols in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

power sharing, yet all contribute to what I argue is a “new” shared authority realized through the utilization of cultural symbols to engage the individual and connect community members within the museum space.

While Michael Frisch denotes the process of collaboration between professionals and communities as “sharing authority,” scholars from the fields of anthropology, ethnohistory, and history discuss the same process under varying names. The idea of sharing authority ultimately brings to light a long narration of power relations between academics and the people they study, which often directly reflects power relations in the United States more broadly. Known for his discussions of power relations, French theorist, Michel Foucault often used power as a point of analysis. His works highlights that power found in all social interactions, often marked by a struggle against the dominant institution, creating yet another power. Acknowledging and exploring the power relations at work between museums and the communities they serve is at the heart of sharing authority. The unbalanced relationship between American Indian communities and the institutions, governments, and experts that historically retained power over the interpretation of Native material culture, highlights a long history of disproportionate power in the museum world. In their attempts to teach about Native cultures, museums often exploited cultures and regulated them to the status of “curiosity” or “other.”

Among the earliest to start the discussion of power relations in “othering” was Edward W. Said, who argued that the western world created two imagined worlds that allowed them to translate the East into something foreign and separate from themselves.¹⁸ In the same year, 1978, Robert Berkhofer Jr. also described how white Americans have

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 4-9.

understood and represented Native American groups as “others.” “The paradigm of polarity that lies at the heart of minority and race relations,” Berkhofer explains, “assumes uniqueness for the Whites as classifiers and for Native Americans as the classified only through the content of specific imagery and the context of a particular history and space.”¹⁹ Furthermore, scholars such as Philip Deloria and David Hurst Thomas acknowledge that White Americans claim aspects of Native culture as their own, such as the Boston Tea Party.²⁰ Likewise, museums claimed Native cultural and material objects in the name of preserving American heritage. Such actions maintain that Native groups remain a curious “other” worthy of study while simultaneously insisting that White Americans have more right to the culture than those that created it. These ideas of “othering” and claiming culture are central to discussions of who has authority over American Indian history, reflected in how museums share authority with communities.

Works such as Said’s and Berkhofer’s forced scholars to acknowledge the ways their own research cast cultural groups as “others.” In relation to Said and Berkhofer’s ideas, James Clifford tells us that new methods or epistemologies are necessary in future research practices. Clifford argues, “While ethnographic writing cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, ahistorical ‘others.’”²¹ Power relations and dichotomies are an inevitable

¹⁹ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), xvi.

²⁰ See Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale University, 1998) particularly the introduction; David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), particularly chapter 2.

²¹ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 23.

part of human societies and cultures. A scholar able to reflect upon their own role in those relationships will be able to complicate the idea of “otherness” and insist on new narratives. Concepts of “othering,” power relations, and cultural dichotomies are prominent in literature about representations of culture in museums, much of which focuses on imbalanced power relations of museums and Native cultures in the past and efforts to correct those representations in the present.

The development of ethnohistory seems to speak to a need to understand contact narratives and continuing power relations between cultures in a more complex way, taking into account how the past relates to the present. Ethnohistory, in the words of James Axtell, is “the sharpest, most comprehensive, most inclusive, most flexible tool we have for writing and teaching the history of America’s Native peoples.”²² In blending anthropological and historical approaches to researching communities, the narratives embrace change over time while simultaneously acknowledging timeless cultural nuances.²³ Ethnohistory requires the study of both the past and present in order to understand the culture and worldviews of a community or multiple communities. William Fenton advocates for a process of “upstreaming” when approaching the study of a particular group of people. The method advocates for a reading of history by starting with the present and moving backward in time.²⁴ Fenton explains, “in essence, the method utilizes patterns of culture existing in the living culture for reinterpretation of earlier sources and proceeds by linking these earlier

²² James Axtell, “The Ethnohistory of Native America” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, Donald L. Fixico ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 23.

²³ See James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

²⁴ See: William N. Fenton, “The Training of Ethnologist in America,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jul-Sept, 1952), pp. 328-339.

patterns in a direct sequence, but against the tide of history, going from a known present to the unknown past.”²⁵ The method is not without flaws, but it points to a necessity to connect the culture and people in the present with events in the past and recognizes that there is much to learn from living communities. Though Fenton does not directly speak to sharing of authority, by working to understand the communities he worked with, as they exist in the present as well as the past, he gave them the authority to explain their culture as they lived and experienced it. This approach does not demolish power struggles, as the scholar is still given the final voice in his/her work; however, it is at least a recognition that a professional should consult and work with living communities.

To analyze the ways the museums included in the study view their role within their communities, this study utilized a theoretical approach of symbolic anthropology suggested by anthropologist Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Culture*.²⁶ Geertz argues, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.” Furthermore, Geertz, “take[s] culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”²⁷ Geertz’s framework of analysis of culture is important to this study for a number of reasons. First, it offers a method of “thick description” that provides a means to examine the culture within each institution that encourages or hinders its ability to collaborate effectively with its community. “As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or

²⁵ William N. Fenton, “Ethnohistory and its Problems,” *Ethnohistory* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter, 1962), 12.

²⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books), 1973.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

processes can be causally attributed” rather, Geertz suggests, “it [culture] is a context, something within which they [symbols] can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described.”²⁸ Following Geertz’s approach, the collections and exhibitions developed by an institution are symbols within the context of the museum’s culture that one can analyze and interpretively describe. For the purposes of this study, the analysis of the symbols in a museum are understood individually for their representations of meaning to an audience, but are also examined within the context of the culture of the institution. Secondly, Geertz framework offers a means to analyze how the use of cultural symbols within museum space can help improve collaboration efforts with the communities that relate to those symbols. Geertz argues, “Meanings can only be ‘stored’ in symbols.” Using an example of religion, Geertz notes, “religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.”²⁹ The type of meaning stored in a cultural symbol is not limited to religious symbols alone, but the same degree of importance in meaning rests in diplomatic, societal, or physical (relating to place) symbols as well. The Akwesasne Museum utilizes cultural symbols such as Wampum belts (diplomatic), lacrosse (societal), and basketmaking (physical) to engage community members in the museum in meaningful ways. Cultural symbols exist in every community. To encourage collaboration, museum staff can utilize symbols important to their communities to create new methods of communication as exemplified by the practices at the Akwesasne Museum.

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Ibid., 127.

To demonstrate my argument, this ethnohistorical study uses oral histories and oral traditions, material culture and exhibitions in museum collections, and historical documentation to demonstrate how tribal museums are changing the meaning of "museum" to create meaningful relationships with the public.³⁰ The study utilized two collections of oral histories in the archive at the Akwesasne Museum as well as interviews conducted for the purpose of this dissertation. The oral histories in the Akwesasne Museum included a collection of interviews with basketmakers conducted by museum staff in 2006, recorded and transcribed in the museum archives. The oral traditions collection includes a number of oral traditions transcribed in both English and Mohawk in 1984. These collections served as a starting point to understanding the community and sense of place at Akwesasne. To develop a better sense of how the community interacted with the museum directly, I conducted eleven interviews with members of the Akwesasne community that either had a direct or marginal relationship with the museum. This study was concerned with how the museum collaborates with members of the community that desire a voice in the museum process. All of the people I interviewed indicated they had some kind of relationship with the museum, even if it was as an infrequent visitor. This study demonstrates that the museum actively works with community members that wish to participate, but a further study may reveal ways the museum could increase its outreach to get more people involved.

To determine who to interview, I started with the museum. Past and present museum staff served as a starting point to further understanding the institution's history and objectives. I also interviewed basketmakers with a relationship to the museum through the

³⁰ The work of ethnologist William N. Fenton greatly influenced this work and provided a guideline for an ethnohistorical approach. For an overview of Fenton's life work, see William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

traditional arts classes it offers. Some community members interviewed did not have a direct relationship to the museum but were involved in basketmaking or projects concerning environmental conservation such as the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment. These interviews offered a sense of how concepts of place and cultural symbols related Akwesasne broadly to compare to the museum's interpretation. Some interviews happened organically during the long hours spent researching at the museum. These interviews were often the most revealing since they occurred with community members that came in to use the museum for one reason or another and were kind enough to share their thoughts. Some interviewees gave permission to record the interview on an audio file and provided consent for the use their name in the research. Others requested that I not record the interview and their names remain confidential. In cases of confidentiality, I present the information they provided through the use of other available sources or I indicate in the text that the information came from a confidential source. All together, the interviews I conducted totaled approximately ten hours of audio interviews. The audio files and the transcriptions of the interviews are in my possession, but the oral history collections I utilized are available at the Akwesasne Museum. Due to the scope of the research, the interviews do not represent all community members, but do reveal how the museum works with community members that have some interest in the museum.

I utilized a number of archives during my research including the records at the Akwesasne Museum, the Akwesasne Library, and the holdings at the New York State Museum, The New York State Archives, and The Iroquois Indian Museum. The collections at the Akwesasne Museum included the basketmaker oral history collection and files on the development of exhibitions. The archive in the museum consists of working files, and their organization varies. Files on exhibitions contain information regarding funding, research,

and design in addition to outlining the participants from the community in the project. Most of their holdings are from recent projects at the museum, and the Akwesasne Library upstairs from the museum held files that contain more historical information on the museum. Since the museum falls under the umbrella of the Akwesasne Cultural Center that includes the museum and library, information on the daily operation of the facility is located in the library. To understand the museum holistically, I examined the exhibitions and collections in addition to the documentary evidence. Exhibitions and collections in museum spaces are particularly revealing regarding the goals of the institution and what they hope to portray to visitors. The basket collection was of particular interest as an important cultural symbol that unites a number of the goals of the museum including preservation and perpetuation of traditional arts that invites the community to participate in an active way. During one of my visits, I observed a basketmaking class to see how the museum worked with the community. During the class, one young basketmaker gave me a tour of the museum through her eyes, which was revealing to how a basketmaker uses the basket collection directly to contribute to her craft. Instead of limiting the analysis to how the museum viewed its goals on paper, using the exhibits, collections, and programming as sources provided a holistic view of the relationship between the museum and the community.

The holdings at the New York State Museum (NYSM) and New York State Archives spoke to the founding of the institution and the relationship the museum developed with Native groups in New York throughout its history. *The Museum Bulletin* available at through New York State Archives chronicled the mission of the museum over time as well as the interests and objectives of personnel that served in prominent positions which helped mold the focus of the museum. *The Museum Bulletin* were of particular interest since the museum

designed them for public view and present the ways the museum hoped to reach its audience. The Anthropology Department in the Museum also holds the Arthur C. Parker collection that contains correspondence between the first NYSM archaeologist, Arthur C. Parker, and other museum staff. Also included are Parker's communications with his contacts in Native communities throughout New York State. The collection also provides his plans for his diorama life groups and his efforts to include Iroquois people in the process of developing the exhibition. I was fortunate to examine the Henry Lewis Morgan collection of mid-nineteenth and early 20th-century material objects in the Ethnographic Collection in order to understand how the museum studies and cares for Iroquois cultural material. Informal interviews with museum staff helped to gather information about the goals and practices of the museum, but the restrictions of the New York State Museum prohibited formal interviews. Wherever possible, I used information gained during these conversations with available sources that did not require the use of the interview directly to get across the same point. I also used the exhibitions in the museum as a source to provide information regarding how the museum communicates its goals to the public.

I used similar methods in my research at the Iroquois Indian Museum (IIM). The research started with the newsletter the museum distributes to its members. The newsletter chronicled the development of the museum from its current location in Howes Cave, New York in 1994, and histories written by museum staff held in the museum's archive provided information about the earlier founding of the museum in Schoharie, New York. The Museum Archives contains further information about how the museum works with the Iroquois communities through its exhibition and programming files. The exhibitions also served as a source for the types of messages the museum hopes to portray to visitors. I was fortunate during one of my visits to observe a school group taking a tour of the museum,

which served as a great opportunity to see the interpretation of the museum in action. I supplemented the sources at the museum with newspaper articles and publications from and about the museum.

The information I gathered on the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) came primarily from site visits and observations of the exhibitions, government documents concerning the development of the museum, and scholarly publications that discuss the various reactions to the representations and practices of the institution. Collections at the Heard Museum and Arizona State University's Labriola Center and Special Collections contained early bulletins and plans for the Museum of the American Indian George Gustav Heye created that became the collection for the NMAI. The early bulletins provide a sense of how Heye directed his collection and displays, while the government documents relating to the transfer of the collections to the NMAI reveal the objectives of the new institution. The government documents combined with critiques of the museum from Native and non-Native scholars provide a sense of how the museum exercises shared authority. The inclusion of the NMAI in this study serves to provide an example on a federal level of a museum claiming to share power with the communities it represents, include the Iroquois people. It provides yet another point of analysis against institutions such as the New York State Museum that represents the Iroquois at the state level, the Iroquois Indian Museum that represents the Iroquois on the private level, and the Akwesasne Museum that presents one group of the Iroquois at the tribal level.

I support the study with an examination of federal Indian policy and Iroquois ethnographies woven into the analysis. I utilized a number of federal legislative and government documents to examine the how the United States government, scientists, and museum professionals recognized Native groups concerning the preservation and collection

of material culture. The rhetoric in the documents reveals power relations between Euro-Americans and Native groups over time which is essential to understanding how mainstream museums view their authority with the communities they represent. Responses and consequences of legislation also presents the arguments of Native communities requesting access to cultural material and expose the desires of many Native groups to create their own institutions. Iroquois ethnologies, such as those by Lewis Henry Morgan and William N. Fenton, and works about the Iroquois by historians, archaeologists, and ethnohistorians provided a base to understand the important elements of the culture at Akwesasne. I analyzed the ethnologies in collaboration with what members of the community had to say about themselves and their community either in published form or through oral histories.

The main methodologies driving this dissertation are ethnohistory and public history. The definition of public history often reflects the current practices of the field. Over the years, evolving definitions of public history provide clear evidence that public history is about a *process* of doing history in the public realm, rather than set on a distinct subject matter as in other historical fields of study. Public history methodology is broad, yet for this project, the emphasis is on collaboration between academic history and public to create a meaningful representation of the past. In essence, this methodology is a sharing of authority, meaning the project will balance my own objectivity as a historian piecing together documentary evidence with what the communities say about their history and institutional practices. Shared authority is a practice that this research will utilize while working with the staffs at the various museums and the communities the museums serve while it simultaneously explores and analyzes how the institutions negotiate the practice. The concept of power sharing and collaboration is central to this dissertation and serves as a method of research and a means of analysis.

Historiography

The scholarship that informs the dissertation includes the field of public history and the development of the concept of shared authority, the growing field of study focused on interpretations of American Indians in museums, Iroquois ethnologies, and cultural anthropology. Museums are places of power. Through interpretive displays of cultural objects, museums possess the power to tell a community of visitors what is important about their past, how their community developed, and essentially who they are. In his book, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995), Tony Bennett provides a “genealogy of the modern public museum,” in which he ultimately concludes that the new museum must be distinguished from its predecessors.³¹ He notes that museums developed an exhibitionary complex that allowed for an ordering of things and people in the age on imperialism and argues, “While the late nineteenth-century museums were thus intended *for* the people, they were certainly not *of* the people.”³² Likewise, Flora Kaplan argues in *Museums and the Making of “Ourselves”: the Role of Objects in National Identity* (1994) that museums are spaces where power struggles are present through the display of objects meant to shape a sense of identity. Furthermore, Steven C. Dubin argues in *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (1999) that museums are political and, therefore, they retain a responsibility to raise public awareness of social change. Often museums recognized their need to change their interpretation only after communities began to protest existing museum narratives. In her work, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices*, Karen Coody Cooper focuses on the “role *American Indians* have played in changing museums through

³¹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 109.

protest.”³³ Cooper notes that protestors created the power to force museum representations and practices to change, while arguing that there is a need for both museum professors and Native groups to communicate and work to understand each other. These works recognize that museums are places of power with social and political responsibilities to the public; however, they do not address how museums should handle sharing authority.

Many museums today work to fix the social and cultural wrongs of the past in light of protests from communities and changes in accepted scholarship methods that call for multiple voices in narrative. However, simply acknowledging past practices of prescribing social, cultural, and economic communities as “others” is just one piece of the greater discussion about authority in museums overall. It is important to explore fully the arguments for and against sharing authority in museums. The concept of “shared authority” links to public history practice more broadly and often scholars use the term to describe the work of a public history practitioner. The idea of negotiating between the academic world and the public, while maintaining the ability to see the public as a viable source to understand the past and present, are central to the field.

Michael Frisch is often cited as terming the phrase “shared authority,” yet the concept of distributing intellectual power between professional historians and their audiences is echoed by other scholars who argue for a “people’s history.” As the influence of oral and public history grew, so too did advocacy for people’s history. This new history recognized the public’s ability to contribute to interpretations of the past and empowered

³³ Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), xi.

them to action as individuals.³⁴ Oral historian Ron Grele suggests, "...the task of the public historian, broadly defined, should be to help members of the public do their own history and to aid them in understanding their role in shaping and interpreting events."³⁵ Institutions must recognize that to share authority requires a conscious decision to relinquish some control over the final products for exhibits and programs. As more scholars embrace the idea of sharing authority, cultural institutions, particularly museums which maintained a long life as "cabinets of curiosities," or "temples" where visitors did not challenge authority, are changing to include community voices in exhibitions or programming.

In the early years of public history practice, the ideas presented by Frisch and other scholars advocating for people's history was contained in a radical subgroup of the new public history field. The journal, *The Public Historian*, along with other publications focused mainly on the type of work academically trained historians could do in the public realm and marked the manner in which the field attempted to define itself. At the same time, works such as *Presenting the Past*, which derived from *The Radical History Review*, sought to explore how historians can work *with* and *for* the public to produce better scholarship. The ideas of sharing authority presented by these scholars ultimately affected the public history field as a whole. Reflecting the notions of postmodernism and the new social history, working in collaboration with public audiences became standard conversation in *The Public Historian* and by public history scholars more broadly. The extent to which the general public desires to participate actively in the construction of history remains a primary debate amongst

³⁴ Susan Port Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

³⁵ Ron Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" *Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981), 47-48.

historians. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen's survey of Americans relationship to the past and their conclusions in *The Presence of the Past* (1998) received as much praise as it did criticism, yet remains an important work since it suggests that the general public does care about the past in some capacity.³⁶ The study revealed to cultural institutions the need to recognize the importance of understanding their audiences in order to creating meaningful experiences that ensure consistent visitation.³⁷

The postmodern focus on the individual and the assumption that all voices should have a say in history has caused conflict and controversy for museums that strive to move beyond metanarratives and introduce alternate versions of the past. In *A Place Not a Place* (2006), David Carr writes:

“We do not grow or learn by going *to* something, we learn by going *through* something... We enter museums to enter ourselves; we come to entrance ourselves. The museum is the performance of my meaning, my observations and reflections on memories; it is also the path that will open when I leave the museum.”³⁸

Thus, the challenge facing the public historian in a museum is to create a meaning to the past that has the capability of reaching visitors on an individual level while still constructing a past grounded in high-quality scholarship. Public historians seek not only to be self-reflective, but also to encourage that same reflectivness in the experiences for the public. Public historians practicing in museums must address issues of authority over the past, language and the communication of history to diverse audiences, and must understand the ways in which

³⁶ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

³⁷ Spencer R. Crew, “A Museum Perspective on “The Presence of the Past,”” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter, 2000), pp. 23-26.

³⁸ David Carr, *A Place Not a Place: Reflection and Possibility in Museums and Libraries* (Lanham, New York, Toronto, and Oxford: AltaMira Press, 2006), 27.

visitors think about the past, while still wrestling with larger, more theoretical concerns, such as the ability to locate the truth in the past.

Many scholars and museum professionals argue that the goal of good museums is to challenge metanarratives that suppress voices outside of the dominant culture and to facilitate cooperation between academics and the public.³⁹ This task becomes complicated even further when there are multiple parties involved. It is difficult to find a grey area of compromise and negotiation when things are not black and white, but a spectrum of colors all with their own concerns and desires. When multiple publics confront museum representation, the role of the museum professional involves remaining as unbiased as possible while attempting to find a narrative that is representative of all involved. Historians working in environments like this must be particularly sensitive to how they distribute authority because they have the ability to affect which narratives can be included in the telling of history. Questions of who has the power to tell or construct history and whom the historical narrative is about are recurrent concerns of many historians and intellectual thinkers. Many perceive museums as places where professionals deliver capital 'H' history authoritatively to a passive audience. Museums need to be especially cautious of their power, and must take into account the multitude of ways they can construct history.

Historians working with the public constantly are in positions where they must share power with entities and people other than themselves. Many historians resist such a practice. In "A Shared Inquiry to a Shared Inquiry" (2006), Katharine Corbett and Howard Miller argue, "*Sharing* authority is a deliberate decision to give up some control over the product of

³⁹ See Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto with Gustavo Buntinx, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Ciraj Rassool, *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

historical inquiry.”⁴⁰ Sharing authority over the past with non-academics or even other academics has rarely been a common practice in history. Beginning in the premodern world, those in positions of power have controlled and constructed history. Roman history, for example, was largely an aristocratic endeavor. Aristocrats utilized their authority over history to create stories and public lessons that would mold good citizens.⁴¹ History was thus constructed to serve the needs of the government, developing a narrative that only included those people and events believed worthy of historic research, overlooking all else, trends continued by political and national histories. Tony Bennett argues that while museums made strides away from the exhibitionary context he described in *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), over a decade later in “Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture” (2006) that “it remains the case, however, that public museums are largely, and probably entirely, the administrative creations of national, municipal, or local governments or private organizations.”⁴² In the article, Bennett articulates that the modern practices of museum incorporating diverse voices into exhibits mimics the ethnocentric methods of the past. The exhibitionary complex of the past highlighted the authority of an institution to display cultural “others,” whereas the modern multicultural approach to organizing museum displays “results in displays that are governed from and by a position of whiteness that constructs diversity as a national possession, a sign of its own tolerance and virtue.”⁴³ The article points

⁴⁰ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into a Shared Inquiry,” in *The Public Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), 20. Italics in original.

⁴¹ Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 48.

⁴² Tony Bennett, “Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture,” *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, eds., (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 62.

to the continued imbalance of power relations between museum professionals and cultural communities as the museums, controlled by federal, state, local, and private enterprises with their own objectives in constructing a sense of place and identity retain their power even when claiming to work with others. Bennett's argument is an important critique of the execution of museum exhibitions that highlight their efforts to include the silenced voices of the past.

For some scholars, the insertion of new voices into historical interpretations which exposed the silencing of many in the grand historical narratives of the past demonstrated the benefits of sharing intellectual authority outside the academy.⁴⁴ While this remains an important aspect of the practice, today the expectations of truly sharing authority is not limited to simply inserting numerous historical perspectives; rather it involves truly working with and listening to the public in the development of exhibits and programs. Many challenges and ethical concerns arise when a historian works with and for a public. In *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History* (2001), Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips argue that the scholarly and intellectual value of historical work need not diminish by collaborating with the public, but one cannot ignore that the questions driving research are different for a public historian than a historian writing for himself or herself or a small academic community.⁴⁵ Some scholars have questioned public historians' objectivity when

⁴⁴ For more information on the silences of the past see: Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); For case studies that offer critical assessments of presenting multiple narratives in museums, see: Warren Laon and Roy Rosenzweig, *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

⁴⁵ See: Bronwyn Dalley, "Finding the Common Ground: New Zealand's Public History," in *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips, eds., (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001).

hired to serve their clients' goals and expectations for a project, and they mark this as a major ethical concern in public history work.⁴⁶ As many academic historians are prone to their own personal bias driving their research questions, this argument is superficial and ignores deeper ethical concerns in negotiating multiple voices, communities, and publics in historical interpretation. Perhaps more important than attempting to remain unbiased is the ability to recognize one's own bias in a situation and be reflective of how that affects the ability to negotiate viewpoints. In *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983), Donald A. Schön, argues that professionals must be flexible, reflexive, and reflective of their own position in collaborative efforts.⁴⁷

The practice of sharing intellectual authority is not as easy as ensuring that products from research avoid bias. Working with and for the public involves acknowledgment of the social and political ramifications presented by reactions of the public to historical interpretations developed in institutions. It also requires recognition that in some cases a cultural institution or the public retain their own interpretive objectives that are not always open to the other. Many scholars indicate that the role of the public historian working with the public is not to directly advocate the public view of the past over that of academic interpretations; rather it involves applying unique skills to negotiate the views of both as objectively as possible without defaulting to the status quo or creating too much controversy. Tom Engelhardt and Edward T. Linenthal reveal in *History Wars: The Enola Gay*

⁴⁶ See Otis L. Graham, Jr., Richard G. Hewlett, David Glassberg, Rebecca Conard, Sam Bass Warner, Jr., "Roundtable: 'The Ideal of Objectivity' and the Profession of History," *The Public Historian* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 9-23; J. Morgan Kousser, "Are Expert Witnesses Whores? Reflections on Objectivity in Scholarship and Expert Witnessing," *The Public Historian* Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 1984) pp. 5-19.

⁴⁷ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

and Other Battles for the American Past (1996) that a little bit of controversy is sometimes welcome in cultural institutions as it incites attention and dialog, yet producing as much attention as the *Enola Gay* may actually work against the institution.⁴⁸ In “Ethics in the Practice of Public History with Aboriginal Communities” (2006), David Neufeld suggests that “in the skillful integration of multiple narratives in an open forum, public history facilitates participants and observers working together in the construction of new sets of relationships, the reframing of existing understandings to better reflect belief in what is right, and the recognition and pursuit of multiple visions of a future.”⁴⁹ Listening and integrating the multiple interpretations of the past in creative and truly inclusive ways is crucial if cultural institutions wish to serve their communities in meaningful and educational ways.

Public historians Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller argue, “Public history is always situational and frequently messy; the case-by-case particulars of reflective practice, reflection-in-action, shared inquiry, and shared authority emerge out of experimental give-and-take.”⁵⁰ Corbett and Miller describe their work on museum exhibition teams where reflective practice was necessary for working with others within the institution as well as engaging the public through oral history projects. Acknowledging how the public interacts with its past, as well as one’s own position within a team that reconstructs that past, can be liberating and beneficial to the historian as well. David Glassberg explains, “In presenting history to the public, I soon discovered that the public was presenting history

⁴⁸ Tom Engelhardt and Edward T. Linenthal, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

⁴⁹ David Neufeld, “Ethics in the Practice of Public History with Aboriginal Communities,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 121.

⁵⁰ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, “A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 19.

back to me as well, and that it was impossible to uphold the separation between the history I practiced and the history I lived and understood.”⁵¹ For cultural institutions, particularly museums, the practice of sharing intellectual authority is just as rewarding as it is for the individual practitioner. Collaborating with communities through oral history projects, for example, not only allows for a holistic representation of the past in exhibits or programs which the efforts immediately affect, but the results of those interviews bring more information into collections that increase the intellectual resources of the institution, which then in turn benefits the large community as well. Shared projects thus create a breadth of opportunities beneficial in multiple ways to all parties involved.

Public historians also face the challenge of making museums and interpretation of the past relevant to visitors in the contemporary world. Historians working in museums must recognize that their visitors come from diverse backgrounds and traditions, and carry their own prejudices and ideas about the world with them. While it requires a degree of imagination and interpretation of past circumstances, it allows guests to relate to people of the past, even though the conditions of their time may vary greatly from our own. Considering the great divide between the historian and his or her subject, Gadamer recognized historians’ traditions that position their prejudice while looking at the past. Gadamer argues, “Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. . . . Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the transmission of tradition.”⁵² Gadamer asserts that historians must recognize their

⁵¹ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 22.

⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Historicity of Understanding.” In *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1988), 267.

own tradition and the affect it has on the manner in which they approached their work. Historians in museums can assist visitors in this endeavor by presenting aspects of the history that present common human experiences, allowing them to feel a closer connection to those of the past. Furthermore, Gadamer established that tradition is unavoidable and maintains influence over individuals. These prejudices are not necessarily a hindrance; rather tradition helps construct the historian's worldview. Thus, the traditions that link both historians and museum guests to the past allow them to understand the circumstances of individuals and collective groups in history and relate to their own lives.

Often museum visitors are searching for the myths of the past that they have come to believe are historic fact. Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller argue that:

Public history is doomed if practitioners insist that people give up their versions of the past in order to benefit from ours, especially if theirs is comforting and ours disturbs the peace. Public historians might at least reflect upon their relentlessly modern, linear, secular, explanatory approach to the past, and explore ways to incorporate older more universal forms of past-keeping.⁵³

The public wants truth as long as it does not disturb their myths, making the job of the public historian even more complex. Museums must draw upon the multiple methods to negotiate between public desires and the need to produce and present history based on good scholarship. Institutions must remain flexible to the changes of perceptions of history as well as the various ways their public wishes to understand and interact with history.

The American Alliance of museums has encouraged museums to democratize their operations and reach out to their communities since its founding in 1906. However, the decision to include communities in the process of the construction of history in museums is

⁵³ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry" in *The Public Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 23.

relatively new. Catherine Lewis argues “museums embark on collaborative projects more in order to survive than because of any shift in philosophy.”⁵⁴ Lewis explains that many urban museums in particular have lost their traditional audiences due to changing immigrant populations. These institutions have needed to adjust how they interact with the communities where they exist in order to make the institution relevant to new populations. Lewis traces the development of the *Neighborhoods* exhibit at The Chicago Historical Society, which worked in collaboration with the community. Community partners worked on the team with museum professionals and were able to select objects for exhibits, advise on the exhibit design, and even veto particular aspects from being included in the exhibit, in an effort of shared authority rarely seen in museums. However, Lewis notes that even in this instance that true sharing of authority did not take place, and at best, the work with the community was a cooperation or coordination with the wants of the community. Lewis argues, “...the complete sharing of authority is an unrealistic goal, in part because museums were not established for this purpose.”⁵⁵ According to Lewis’s assessment, a true objective toward shared authority in the most literal sense would require a clear change in the purpose of cultural institutions or a reevaluation of what “shared authority” actually means.

If shared authority implies simply listening to audience and adjusting ones approach based on the needs of the public rather than an equal division of power, than the job of the public historian is to negotiate as fairly as possible an interpretation of the past with all parties in mind. Particular issues and ethical concerns can arise when cultural institutions address tragic events in the past that have affected the fabric of public memory in America.

⁵⁴ Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

This is the topic addressed in James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton's edited work, *Slavery and Public History*. Presenting meaningful conversation about slavery in a public venue to a public that would rather not address the issue or have strong opinions on the topic can often prove a rather difficult task. "When historians present this information to visitors at public sites, they are often confronted with the charge of presentism," explains James Horton.⁵⁶ While some may argue that historians should not apply twenty-first century morals to the past, slavery in this country has strong social implications to contemporary society and it is irresponsible of any historian to ignore that fact. When addressing such issues, understanding the position of one's audience can be crucial to evoke successfully critical thinking not overly driven by emotion.

For all these arguments about the ability to share authority in museum, few academics discuss how this concept affects the relationship between museums and American Indian communities. Anthropologists and museum professionals have provided the most attention to representation of Native cultures in museums as well as the tribal museum movement over the last thirty years. Many works discuss tribal museums in the context of repatriation practices and the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) such as Tamara Bray's edited work *The Future of the Past* (2001), which discusses tribal museums in select articles and primarily focuses on the creation of museums in order to house repatriated objects. Moira Simpson's *Making Representations* (1996), and Joy Hendry's *Reclaiming Culture* (2005), each address repatriation and changes in museum practice and the impacts of institutional changes to culture. An important work that expands the

⁵⁶ James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., (New York: The New Press, 2006), 38.

conversation to include efforts of cross-cultural collaboration in museums and the sharing of intellectual authority is *Museums and Source Communities* (2003), edited by Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, which explores these issues in North America, the Pacific and the United Kingdom.

Ethical concerns regarding intellectual authority affecting museum professionals expand beyond interpretation to include the often-emotional issue of repatriation. Questionable actions of the past have brought copious amounts of sacred objects and human remains to numerous institutions across the country. In the interest of working with communities, the return of such material is crucial. Repatriation, when done successfully, is a grand gesture of an institution relinquishing its authority over an object and completely returning that power to the communities from which it came.⁵⁷ In America, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) addresses repatriation to American Indian groups; however, these issues have a global range. The trafficking of non-Western cultural property, such as the Mijikenda memorial statues from East Africa, brings many stolen objects into American museums.⁵⁸ Amongst efforts of repatriation to communities in our own country, museum professionals must recognize that their responsibility to share authority extends to any culture they represent within their institution.

⁵⁷ Moira G. Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post Colonial Era*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Devon A. Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ Monica L. Udvardy, Linda L. Giles and John B. Mitsanze, "The Transatlantic Trade in African Ancestors: Mijikenda Memorial Statues (*Vigango*) and the Ethics on Collecting and Curating Non-Western Cultural Property," in *American Anthropologist* Vol. 105, No. 3, (2003), pp. 566-580.

Perhaps in response to decades of misrepresentation in museums or perhaps as part of a larger initiative to redistribute power back to Native groups, tribes across the country are developing museums of their own. In the last 40 years, tribal museums have sprung up across the country. By 2004, over two hundred and thirty tribal museums existed through the United States, according to a report by George H.J. Abrams of the American Indian Museums Program of the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH).⁵⁹ The report demonstrated a desire amongst many groups to develop museums, so it is likely that the number of tribal institutions increased further in the last eight years since the publication of the survey.

The manner of representation of culture and history varies in each tribal museum, as does the audience. For some, they actively seek an outside audience, whereas others do not allow non-community members in at all. In her study, *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representations in Casinos, Museums, and Powwows*, (2006) Mary Lawlor explores a practice of what she terms “displayed withholdings” that occur in spaces where American Indian communities present cultural elements to the public. Lawlor employs Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “contact zones” to express how Native groups choose to present themselves to others, but her study lacks an exploration into what the spaces she describes, namely casinos, museums, and powwows, mean to the people who are a part of the community. Similarly, anthropologist, Christina Taylor Beard-Moose notes in her book *Public Indians, Private Cherokees: Tourism and Tradition on Tribal Grounds* (2009) that the Cherokee Museum completely omits certain elements of Cherokee culture, such as the matrilineal clan system, in order to create a narrative that made the Cherokee appear to be just like the non-Native

⁵⁹ George H.J. Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2004), 3.

guests.⁶⁰ One point of analysis is to examine how the Akwesasne Museum speaks to members of the community as well as tourists and visitors.

Many scholars focus on specific tribal museums, mainly as a mechanism to explore the culture more generally, such as Gwyneira Isaac's work *Mediating Knowledges* (2007), which explores the Zuni museum, or John Brodinger de Uriarte's examination of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in *Casino and Museum* (2007). These works are specific to one museum but they provide a framework for analyzing tribal museums. Brodinger de Uriarte focuses on cultural representation and identity presented within the museum, which differentiates it from this study, though his methods provide insight for analyzing exhibitions within the museums studied. Isaac's work is the closest in framework to this study as it is interested in how the Zuni negotiate different types of knowledge within the museum space, making Isaac's work particularly important to this study. Where Isaac focuses on an ecomuseum (a space only for community members) this study will focus on a museum actively seeking to serve both the community and outsiders. Isaac also highlights the Zuni's efforts to utilize Euro-American museum models with traditional methods of preserving history and knowledge, essentially exploring how traditional methods incorporate outside methods. This study takes an opposite approach, examining how the Akwesasne Museum alters the western museum model to collaborate with its community to create a new meaning of "museum" that could influence non-Native institutions to change the Euro-American structure. The "new" shared authority present at the Akwesasne museum allows the institution to negotiate working with its immediate community while also considering the best way to interact with other visitors that may not be familiar with the culture. This is an important point, since it

⁶⁰ Christina Beard-Moose, *Public Indians, Private Cherokees: Tourism and Tradition on Tribal Grounds* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 115.

highlights the ability of a museum space to identify and share authority with its immediate community while remaining conscious of other audiences that may visit the space.

The recognition of a primary audience and expectation of other visitors outside that audience requires skillful negotiation of communication and power. This type of cooperation is prominent in the practices at the Akwesasne Museum. A tradition of power sharing and compromise appears to be the basis for the museum's practices. For over a century scholars described the Iroquois Great League of Peace, a social, moral, and eventually a political collaboration connecting communities that were culturally similar. This task required an extensive amount of authority sharing, yet the term "sharing authority" has never been used to describe the League.

Ethnographies of the Iroquois and historical studies of the Iroquois League reveal the cultural development of power sharing, compromise, and collaboration. Anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan was perhaps the first to argue that the League of Nations provided the Iroquois with their political and cultural strength in *League of the Ho-Dé-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois* (1851). Morgan mostly credits the League as a military force, which allowed the Iroquois a collaboration of strength against other nations. In this view, he recognizes the League's authority within the area of New York State and perhaps sensationalizing the League's role in Iroquois success during the period of colonization. He does, however, note two different authority sharing organizations (even if he mystified them) and describes the Great League of Peace as a confederacy of Native groups forming separate of European influence, and the Covenant Chain as an alliance formed between the League and the English. Morgan's work is a product of his time and attempts to explain Iroquois power through the League, describing it as an empire, a concept that many historians and anthropologists would dispute for decades.

By 1984, Francis Jennings argued that Morgan's "Iroquois Empire" was myth created by a misunderstanding of the Covenant Chain between the Iroquois and the English. In his book *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (1984), Jennings argues that the idea of an Iroquois Empire was constructed and perpetuated by the English in order to claim more land.⁶¹ To the English, their relationship with the Iroquois was one of "ruler" and "subject," thus when the Iroquois "conquered" other Native nations, the English could claim those lands for themselves as well. This concept, according to the Jennings, points to a misunderstanding of League of Nations by the British, which viewed it as a military force rather than a diplomatic enterprise. While Jennings demonstrates that both the League of Nations and the Covenant Chain were more complicated forms of power negotiation and collaboration than previous scholars, he viewed the Iroquois as victims to the English, exploited by them instead of as active participants that also used the Covenant Chain to their advantage.

Jenning's book inspired a conference to discuss the "myth" of the Iroquois Empire and the papers produced a book, *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800* (1987). The contributors to the work (including Francis Jennings) seek to correct a vision of the Iroquois as a dominating force and highlight the diplomatic endeavors. They argue that "Iroquois preeminence...[stemmed from]...an extraordinary ability to adapt familiar customs and institutions in response to novel challenges, to convert weakness into strengths, and to forge alliances among themselves and

⁶¹ Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984).

with others that helped preserve Native political and cultural autonomy.”⁶² The book strives to understand the Covenant Chain in more complex terms, focusing of the how it affected political dealings with the tribes of the Confederacy and their Native neighbors. This work demonstrates that the Covenant Chain as a separate endeavor for the Great League of Peace created power sharing systems between the Iroquois, the English, and other Native nations.

Moving away from the Covenant Chain and back to a deeper exploration of the League, Daniel Richter argues in *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The People of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (1992) that the league’s focus was cultural and social rather than political. The book portrays the Iroquois as active participants in the adaptation to new “ordeals” which required a readjustment of the purpose of the League at the time of European contact. These forces came in the form of disease leading to depopulation, economic dependence on European trading markets, entanglement in European conflicts, and the infringement on Iroquois lands. Richter explains how the League of Nations allowed for the strength of the Iroquois for so long, even in the face of these challenges. He argues that the League “fostered the acceptance of diverse peoples of varying speech and customs while providing a rock of traditional values to which the peoples of the longhouse could cling as they adapted to new ways of life.”⁶³ Richter views the league as a cultural devise that strengthened bounds between its nations, but focuses less on the political elements the emerged from the League.

⁶² Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain*, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 7-8.

⁶³ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The People of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 3.

William N. Fenton agrees with Richter that the Iroquois League connected the Nations on moral, spiritual, and cultural grounds, but further noted that the Iroquois Confederacy developed as the political branch of the League when dealing with other Native neighbors and Europeans. In his book, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (1998) Fenton argues that the Confederacy emerged in the eighteenth century as a political institution whereas the League by the time of the Confederacy is a symbolic “fictional” system.⁶⁴ Fenton provides a detailed description of how the League and Confederacy developed the political implications for treaties and agreements with other nations, and the breakdown of the Confederacy with the Canandaigua treaty of 1794. In his conclusion, he explains that traditions of the League remained after that point. By describing in detail the social and political structure of the Iroquois League, Fenton reveals the systems of power and authority sharing involved in the process of coming to a consensus. Fenton falls short in explaining how those traditions continued beyond the era of reservations and how the League continued to remain connected even as separate entities.

To understand shared authority at the Akwesasne Museum fully, it is important to explore how the practices at the institution resemble the tradition of the League. Examining the ethnographies of the Iroquois that describe the tradition alongside oral histories and publications by contemporary Iroquois people about the league provide a better sense of all the possible meanings of the league to the people of the past and the present. Based on scholarly accounts, the League of Nations created a system in which levels of authority existed but required balance by another. The entire social structure of the Iroquois relied upon power sharing, in having compassion for other’s thoughts, and in listening. These are

⁶⁴ William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 4.

the tenants described by Fenton, Richter, and Jennings. None of the authors term the concepts of the league as “shared authority,” but the descriptions of the practices align with a meaning of collaboration and striving for an understanding of different viewpoints. I argue throughout that the Akwesasne Museum is a “living” example of the tradition of the League at work. Growing out of a cultural practice of sharing power, the museum is better equipped to share authority with its community. The “new” shared authority exists within tribal museums such as the Akwesasne Museum, because they embrace a culture of sharing at a base level.

The meaning of shared authority within cultural institutions continues to evolve. The desire to retain museum visitation was the primary interest of organizations in the early part of the twentieth century, resonant in the American Association of Museums advocating for museums to embrace their audiences. It is one thing to attract the public into a space, but it is another to engage them effectively in open dialogue. In the effort of the last thirty years to share authority with communities in an active manner, questions remain over who actually represents a “community” and how to negotiate the views of various communities when they compete with one another. Ivan Karp said it best in 1992; “The acknowledgment by museums of the existence of publics entails the idea that these entities should be asked about their own opinions and interests and about the effects of exhibitions on their sense of who they are.” Furthermore, Karp argues, “Inevitably we will discover that audiences have multiple opinions and multiple identities.”⁶⁵ The challenge of the public historian in cultural institutions sharing authority with the public remains the same: to be self-reflective, to listen

⁶⁵ Ivan Karp, “Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 14.

to the public, and to negotiate ethically the inclusion of multiple voices in a manner that is respectful to all parties and presents a meaningful and holistic view of the past. Regardless of the difficulties, it is a challenge worth pursuing.

Organization of Chapters

I organized the dissertation into two parts; the first includes chapters one, two, and three. These chapters explore the theories of shared authority within the fields of public history and museum studies, provide a history of how mainstream museums developed a sense of authority through political and legislative means, and explore three institution's attempts at reaching a balanced authority with communities. The second part focuses on Akwesasne and tribal museums specifically. Chapters four, five, and six explore a tradition of alliances and collaboration in Iroquoian culture, how a sense of place assists in the museum's ability to reach and represent the entire community, and how politics and social pressures influence the development of exhibitions and programming at the museum. Chapter seven links the two parts together, connecting Akwesasne to the greater tribal museum movement and presents how tribal museums are redefining the meaning of "museum" in response to the authority mainstream museums maintained over culture for decades.

Three different theories of authority meet and are represented through the Akwesasne Museum that demonstrate more broadly why Native communities adapted and reorganized the western institution of museums to preserve and present culture. First, the study addresses the theory of shared authority as informed by Michael Frisch and other scholars in the fields of public history and museum studies. Frisch's call to redistribute intellectual authority argues that historians trained within the academy should view their role as mediators of the past rather than historical authorities since communities have a lot to offer and to communicate about the meaning of the past to the present. This chapter

explored the historiography of shared authority as it relates to Frisch's vision and explores a tradition of shared authority in Haudenosaunee culture. Chapter three explores examples of attempted partnerships or "shared authority" initiatives by traditional museums, such as The New York State Museum, the Iroquois Indian Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian. Each of these museums claims to work closely with Native communities in the construction of exhibitions programming. This chapter will attempt to uncover the practices of each museum in working with the Iroquois.

The authority of the United State government, and within it western institutional museum policies, represents a second type of authority that presents both a sense of ownership over Native history and a need to negotiate authority with sovereign nations. Chapter two of this work addresses how and why both historical and contemporary traditional museums frame Native communities as outsiders to the museum process of interpretation. It will show how legislation and professional attitudes created a hierarchy of power over cultural representation that did not extend to communities. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates that a long history of unequal power relations limited Native communities' access to material culture and that embodying cultural symbols is important the process of the new shared authority. Cultural symbols are key tools in engaging and connecting to a museum's community and United States legislation regulates access to those materials by the communities that created them. The chapter speaks to issues of repatriation, and also investigates how cultural material made its way into mainstream museums. The exploration of such treatment provides the context for the roots of distrust, which serves as one reason why many communities created their own museums to regain power and intellectual authority. This chapter will further explore the federal programs and legislation, such as Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and The

American Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975, which encouraged the growth of tribal museums in order to establish spaces for repatriated objects as well as educational opportunities. The chapter is important since it provides insight as to why Native communities chose the museum as a medium to preserve and present their culture and history.

The third pillar contributing to the analysis is the long history of Iroquois authority demonstrated through the Six Nations Confederacy, the Longhouse Law, Tree of Peace and alliances with Euro-Americans such as the Covenant Chain, established a firm history of sharing authority in Iroquoian worldviews. This history informs the place from which the Akwesasne Museum developed, and provides an explanation to how the museum is able to make community members feel a sense of ownership over the museum. Concepts of authority presented in Iroquoian worldviews weave throughout the work, particularly in the second half of the study. It is impossible to talk about the development of the Akwesasne Museum without discussing the culture and politics of the place that created it. Chapter four discusses the tradition of collaboration and power sharing in Iroquoian cultures in order to describe how those ideas informed the creation of the museum. Furthermore, it examines the traditional arts programs that encourage community members to view the museum as a space to use rather than just visit. Chapter five provides an explanation of the ways the museum emphasize cultural symbols such as basketmaking as a way to encourage power-sharing, community-building, and creating a sense of place. By embracing a sense of place at Akwesasne, this chapter argues that the museum views itself as merely a reflection of the culture that already exists, rather than trying to construct meaning and culture for the community it demonstrates that shared authority developed organically without being forced. Since the attempts to distribute power in Iroquois communities is not perfect,

chapter six discusses the various political, social, and financial elements with influence the content in the museum's exhibits and programming. The chapter seeks to explore how many parties are sharing authority in the museum space.

The three theories of authority (shared authority, governmental authority, and Iroquoian authority) analyzed together reveal a “new” shared authority at work in the Akwesasne Museum that combines and negotiates all three ideas about power, authority, and ownership within a museum space that is still able to focus on the desires and needs of the community. The last chapter compares the Akwesasne museum with other tribal museums in order to demonstrate that this “new” shared authority exists in other institutions. It investigates the need for a new approach to collaboration as the growing number of communities opening their own museums suggests that power sharing is not working in traditional institutions. This chapter will make a case that tribal museum practices can offer a model to larger institutions that are unsure how to make shared authority work in their museums.

Terminology is always a careful concern when dealing with cultural groups. Throughout the dissertation, I will always use the name Akwesasne when referring to the place, though I sometimes substitute St. Regis Reservation if it seems appropriate to the context of the discussion. There are various spellings of “Akwesasne,” though I chose this the spelling used most frequently and by a variety of organizations and institutions at Akwesasne, such as the Museum. “Akwesasronon” is a term used in Akwesasne to refer to members of the community. The people of Akwesasne are Mohawk, though not all Mohawk live in Akwesasne. There are other Mohawk communities including Kahnawà:ke or Kenhtè:ke with reserved lands in Canada. The name “Mohawk” is borrowed from a Narraganset term, though the people referred to themselves as “Kanien'kehá:ka” meaning

“People of the Flint.” Today, the people and scholars use the term “Mohawk,” and for this reason, it is the term favored throughout. The Mohawk people comprise the eastern most nation of the Iroquois League which also includes the Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Tuscarora. I use both the terms Iroquois and Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) to refer to the members of the League of Nations which are social and politically connected Native peoples in the Northeast speaking a similar language. More broadly, I use the terms “Native,” “American Indian,” and “Indigenous peoples” interchangeably.

In the world of cultural institutions, the definition of what constitutes a “museum” is up for debate. Due to this, it is crucial to explain what I mean by the terms “museum” and “cultural center” when used to explain different types of organizations. Many scholars define museums as spaces that collect and care for objects, which they display in exhibitions to the public. Alternatively, a cultural center provides a space for cultural activities that may have exhibitions, but they are often less interested in preserving a collection of material objects, though they may keep a library of cultural books and documents. Both institutions strive to provide a place for the public to interact with cultural elements, but their methods will differ based on the types of collections (or lack thereof) available in the institution. Cultural centers may also have a museum as a part of their institution, as is the case at the Akwesasne Cultural Center. The Akwesasne Cultural Center is comprised of both a library upstairs and a museum downstairs. Since the museum is a distinct entity within the cultural center, this dissertation focuses on the museum as a “museum.” When I am referring to the museum as its own entity, I call it the Akwesasne Museum. When referring to the greater institution that includes both the library and museum, I call it the Akwesasne Cultural Center. In its collaboration efforts, the museum sometimes appears to blur the lines between “museum”

and “cultural center,” a practice that is mirrored at other tribal museums, altering the meaning and purpose of “museum.” In many ways, this is at the heart of sharing authority. The significance of this dissertation is its demonstration that the ability to share authority and power in a museum space is not impossible; rather, it is dictated by the culture and ideas that inform the institution’s creation and management. In response to this work, some may argue that the ability to collaborate with communities is achievable within tribal museums because their communities are small and all members share the same culture. I argue that negotiating ideas and initiating collaboration with the community is difficult even in tribal museums. Encouraging the involvement of the community in museum programming and exhibition development creates an opportunity to work through controversy and stimulate community building. Akwesasne is the perfect example of this point, where multiple governmental entities, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices are present in the same place. The Akwesasne museum is able to find some way to negotiate multiple viewpoints, proving that it is possible in a museum space. Furthermore, all museums serve some identifiable audience (indeed many museums spend great sums of money to identify that audience for marketing purposes). Instead of simply trying to speak *to* those people, museums should strive for ways to speak *with* those audiences. The assertion is not an impossible task, but it does require a rearrangement of our ideas regarding the role of museum professionals and museums in our communities.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTS OF DISTRUST:

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S PATH TO A SHARED AUTHORITY

On July 24, 1898, Harriet Maxwell Converse purchased a wampum belt at Akwesasne known as the Wolf Belt. As part of the New York State Museum's efforts to increase their collection of wampum belts, Mrs. Converse who had connections to a number of Native traders, gathered belts to sell to the museum. Collected, cataloged, and packed away, the belt rested in the museum for over a century. Social and legal changes shaped the fate of the belt, putting in on a path to return back to Akwesasne. Due to NAGPRA regulations, the museum issued a notice on June 7, 2004 noting that repatriation of the belt would proceed if no other parties submitted a claim of ownership. After a long journey passing from tribal hands to a private collector, and then to the State Museum's collection, the Wolf Belt was finally on a path to return home by way of a federal legislative order.⁶⁶

Centuries of American federal Indian policy and law worked to remove and even destroy Native cultures from the United States. Bureaucrats, who designed policies, strove to gain control of Native lands. They also attempted to assimilate Native cultures into the mainstream society while simultaneously collecting the material culture of Native nations for museums to preserve, exhibit, and interpret as both “exotic” and distinctly “American.” Museums, whether they acknowledge it or not, have played a central role in displacing Native people from their material culture and religious objects that were placed in museums in the name of preservation. The dispossession of Native communities from museums was due to a number of laws that protected museums’ authority and often did not even acknowledge the Native communities to which the items belonged. The large collections that remained in museums caused a national outcry for repatriation of these objects, eventually leading to the enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

⁶⁶ Notice of Intent to Repatriate a Cultural Item: New York State Museum, Albany, New York, *Federal Register* Volume 69, Number 136 (Friday, July 16, 2004) accessed <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2004-07-16/html/04-16147.htm>.

(NAGPRA) in 1990.⁶⁷ For over a century, federal legislation regulated if and how museums would share power with Native communities, and created laws that dictated how communities would gain access to their cultural material. Even when legislation, such as NAGPRA redistributed power, it remained unequal.

The issue of displacement runs deeper than repatriation. Former director of the National Museum of the American Indian, W. Richard West, Jr. argues that the museum world and the American legal system view Native cultures in similar ways. West notes, “Both those institutions reflect the views and notions of the larger society concerning Indian culture, and that view is decidedly ‘western’ and rarely includes anything approaching a Native interpretation of Indian culture.”⁶⁸ The constructed view of Native people in the law and museum practices, which West refers to, excluded Indigenous voices from constructing their own stories and denied them access the museum process. Museums originating from Western tradition exploited Native cultures as curiosities and objects for study, interpretation, and presentation, creating a situation of distrust and apprehension among Native communities toward museums. Distrust of mainstream and non-Native institutions also contributed to the desire of many Native communities to create their own museums where the community maintains material culture and intellectual property rights on their own terms. The creation of Native owned and operated museums was a response to decades of mistreatment by both museum professionals and federal Indian policy measures, which supplanted communities from the right to preserve their own history. More importantly,

⁶⁷ *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990*. Public Law 101-601, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 104 (November 16, 1990): 3048.

⁶⁸ W. Richard West, Jr., “From *Cherokee v. Georgia* to the National Museum of the American Indian: Images of Indian Culture,” *American Indian Law Review* (Vol. 15, No. 2, 1990-1991), 410.

tribal museums offer a means to regain power over the preservation and representation of the past, present, and future of Native communities. Understanding the actions of mainstream museums and federal policy in the past and present consequently offers a means to understanding the circumstances that contributed to the rise of tribal museums across the nation.

The greater influence of federal Indian policy, particularly those acts pertaining to cultural resources, created an atmosphere of distrust making many Native communities skeptical about the intentions of museum professionals. Some changes in legislation address the displacement of Native people from their own history and material culture in museum spaces, though differences in worldviews often continue an imbalance of power.⁶⁹ Federal policies that pertain to museums or academic endeavors that bring cultural materials into museums favored museum professionals and academic “experts” over American Indian communities’ experts, denying those authorities and the communities’ access to sacred objects and the interpretation of their own history. While certain policies attempted to correct this problem and give Native people more control within the museum world, contemporary policies, such as NAGPRA, still affirm the academic privileged position in the eyes of the law.

Marked by turmoil and cultural destruction, the history of the federal government’s relationship with Native nations from the establishment of European colonies in the Americas, Euro-Americans maintained a sense of dominance and control over Native nations. The destruction of Native cultures by the American government specifically

⁶⁹ See Patricia Allyn Biggs, “Tangled Truths: The Power of Worldviews, Memories, and Material Interest in NAGPRA Disputes, 1990-2010” (PhD diss., Tempe: Arizona State University, 2011).

corresponds with the obsession of collectors and museum professionals to collect and preserve material reminiscent of cultures deemed “exotic” or “primitive.” I term this collecting mania in the museum world “compulsive collecting” to describe an impulse by collectors that they could not ignore or in some cases control.⁷⁰ Compulsive collecting extended even into the highest ranks of American government: its presidents. Thomas Jefferson maintained his own cabinet of curios in the entry hall to his library and displayed numerous pieces of American Indian material culture collected on the Lewis and Clark expedition.⁷¹ At the same time Jeffersonian Indian Policy and treaties displaced American Indians from their homelands, American collectors and museums took physical reminiscences of their cultures, causing further destruction to Native communities.

The history of museums interactions with Native groups has been one that combines federal policies with individual museum policies, creating a complex web that does not always address all concerns or issues involved in displaying American Indian culture. Policy has worked in three major ways to affect the relationship between Native communities and museums: through archaeological excavations that brought materials into museums, through federal Indian policies that attempted to expand Native sovereignty and rights to varying degrees of success, and through federal policies that directly influenced changes in non-Native museums and educational institutions. Federal legislation concerning Native nations tracks the power relations between federal authority and Native authority and demonstrates a path toward a sharing of authority between the two parties.

⁷⁰ I apply the term “compulsive collecting” to evoke the sense of obsession for collecting materials seen in collectors during the age of the “vanishing Indian.” The impulse of the era was to collect as much as possible before the cultures in their authentic state disappeared entirely.

⁷¹ Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 104.

Federal Archaeology

Museum policies and the federal policies that affect museums and other academic professionals are extensions of the overall intents of the greater objectives in federal Indian policies. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 (4 Stat. 411), which moved Indian nations from their homelands to lands in Indian Territory or current day Oklahoma, ultimately set the tone for the disposal of Native nations and cultures in the name of American progress and desire to expand its land base. This policy challenged American Indian identity by removing tribes from the places that informed their culture.⁷² Additionally, moving American Indian communities created the opportunity for the expansion of federal and privately held lands. Expansion of federal land holdings allowed for the excavations of tribal burial grounds or other sites resting on those lands that produced human remains and materials that eventually made their way into museums. It would be these lands, those that were once traditional homelands, that could be further exploited legally under acts such as the Antiquities Act of 1906 (PL 59-209), which protected excavations for academic purposes on federal lands.⁷³

Excessive looting of prehistoric and historic materials from federal and tribal lands called for the government to make some provision of protection of these materials. The Antiquities Act addressed issues of looting, leaving the authority of such excavations and the objects they unearthed in the hands of archaeologists, museum professionals and other institutions of learning. Section 3 of this act in particular speaks to the authority the federal government and museums have over the funerary and other “archaeological” objects found on federal lands. This act stipulates that in all excavations practitioners must collaborate

⁷² Indian Removal Act of May 28, 1830, 4 Stat. 411.

⁷³ *Antiquities Act of 1906*, Public Law 209, 59th Cong., 1st sess. (June 8, 1906), 225. (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 431-433 (2000)).

with an educational institution for the purposes of advancing knowledge, and “the gatherings shall be made for permanent preservation in public museums.”⁷⁴ By specifying that archaeologist must turn over the material gathered at to a museum or intellectual institution, the act sought to cease all amateur archaeological investigations. This places the scholarly professional archaeologist in the highest esteem and reinforces the idea that educational facilities had a legitimate right to the information contained in dwelling and grave sites in the name of science. While this denied access to amateurs, it also prevented American Indians from participating as well. Only those with the granted “authority” to care for the materials uncovered on federal lands had access to sites, thus blocking Native communities whose grave sites lay on federally occupied lands. As Native Anthropologist, Joe E. Watkins suggests, “Congress’ actions, whether by accident or by design, benefited the scientific community more than it benefited the cultures whose heritage it was supposed to protect.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, the act treated the American Indian dead differently than any other ethnicity and the act “converted these dead persons into ‘federal property.’”⁷⁶ In 1896, Archaeologist Jesse Fewkes expressed concerns over the growing numbers of looters that were ruining archaeological sites. He supported the passing of a bill to help protect the destruction of these resources. According to Fewkes, writing in the latter part of the nineteenth century:

⁷⁴ For a detailed history of the Antiquities Act, see David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, eds., *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ Joe E. Watkins, “The Antiquities Act at One Hundred Years: A Native American Perspective,” David Harmon, Francis P. McManamon and Dwight T. Pitcaithley, eds., *The Antiquities Act*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 192.

⁷⁶ Jack F. Trope and Walter R. Echo-Hawk, “The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History” in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?*, Devon A. Mihesuah, ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 127.

A commercial spirit is leading to careless excavations for objects to sell, and walls are ruthlessly overthrown, buildings torn down in hope of a few dollars' gain. The proper designation of the way our antiquities are treated is vandalism...It would be wise legislation to prevent this vandalism as much as possible and good science to put all excavation of ruins in trained hands.⁷⁷

Once signed into law, the Antiquities Act did reduce excessive looting, which to some extent did protect sites across the country from complete destruction.

While the act was a step toward the protection of material culture, it did not make any stipulation for communication or collaboration with Native communities, nor did it protect these sites from archaeologists if the respective Native groups did not want excavations to take place. The rhetoric of the act caused concern among Native groups that often viewed the archaeologists as the looters. Regardless, anything uncovered during digs following the passing of the Antiquities Act became federal property, distributed to repositories and used for historic and scientific research without the involvement of affiliated groups.⁷⁸ The legislation does not specifically mention American Indian remains, however it does mention “prehistoric structures” and “ruins” suggesting that this applies to Native remains.⁷⁹ Even human remains became federal property.

Legislation did not address the issues many Native groups had with the Antiquities Act immediately. In 1935, President Roosevelt signed into law The Historic Sites Act (PL 74-292) expanding the Antiquities Act beyond applying strictly to federal lands. Roosevelt

⁷⁷ J. Walter Fewkes, "Two Ruins Recently Discovered in the Red Rock Country, Arizona," *American Anthropologist* Vol., IX, No. 8, (Washington D.C.: Judd and Detweiler, 1896), 269-70.

⁷⁸ Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Rights and Archaeology” in *Native Americans and Archaeologists: Stepping Stones to Common Ground*, Nina Swindler, Kurt E. Dongoske, Roger Anyon, Alan S. Downer, eds., (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997).68.

⁷⁹ *Antiquities Act of 1906*, Public Law 209, 59th Cong., 1st sess. (June 8, 1906), 225. (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 431-433 (2000)).

established the act to “preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance.”⁸⁰ The act also established an advisory board, called the “Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments,” comprised of individuals from a variety of academic expertise to advise the secretary of the interior on matters pertaining to the National Parks of sites protected by this act.⁸¹ Most importantly, this act placed the responsibility for establishing the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings into the hands of the Secretary of the Interior and established a connection between the government and archaeological resources. As with the Antiquities Act, the Historic Sites act in no way mentions those whose ancestors were considered to be the “archaeological resources.” Ultimately, as anthropologist Joe Watkins notes, the act “reaffirmed the idea that cultural resources, regardless of whose ancestors had produced them, were important the nation as a whole.”⁸² The need for experts to study and preserve cultural material that was “American” included Native groups not given a say over the excavation or use of their own cultural resources. This action disempowered Native communities on matters concerning the handling, study, and use of their own cultural material.

In the rising interest of historic preservation and setting procedures for the recovery and protection of cultural materials came the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

⁸⁰ *Historic Sites Act of 1935*, Public Law 292, 74th Cong., 1st sess. (August 21, 1935), 666.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Joe Watkins, “The Politics of American Archaeology: Cultural Resources, Cultural Affiliation and Kennewick,” in *Indigenous Archaeologies: Decolonizing Theory and Practice*, ed. Claire Smith and H. Martin Wobst, (London: Routledge, 2005), 190.

(NHPA).⁸³ This act established the National Register of Historic Places and the criteria for determination of the eligibility of historic sites to be on the register. Widely used since its adoption the act continues to inform historic preservation efforts.⁸⁴ In its original form, it made no reference to how the legislation might affect Native communities or cultural resources off reservations. An amendment to the act in 1980 created a more equal distribution of power among Native communities and state and local governments in partnership with the federal government to assist in the efforts of preservation. A further amendment⁸⁵ in 1992 established tribal historic preservation offices and allowed the inclusion of sacred and traditional sites in the process of determining eligibility according the criteria already outlined in the act.⁸⁵

While the amendments to the NHPA allowed for greater involvement of Native people in the preservation process, the government still maintained the ability, based on the guidelines in the act, to decide which sites to place on the register. The act requires that Native groups prove the worth of preserving ancestral sites, rather than just leaving the decision to preserve in the hands of the communities alone. If Native communities require assistance in assuring the preservation of sites, they must go through this process and follow guidelines ascribed by the federal government. While tribes are not required under the act to submit their sites to the determination of eligibility process, those that choose to have several concerns they must address. One was revealing sacred information to outsiders, such as anthropologists and archaeologists, who will be working on the preservation of the site.

⁸³ *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, Public Law 89-665, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 80 (October 15, 1966): 915.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

In addition to this, the tribes open themselves up to criticism from any number of “expert witnesses” who may contradict the eligibility of the site. The law places intellectual authority for determination eligibility in the hands of highly-educated, yet possibly unfamiliar, outsiders and not the tribes themselves. The battle for intellectual rights over historic sites, and more particularly, cultural material, plays a large role in relations between Native communities and the museums that handle the materials from these sites.

While the National Historic Preservation Act may apply mainly to sites outside of the museum space, it does inform what material may enter into a museum and how an interpretive center placed on the historic site may present material to visitors. The act certainly brings up questions over the intellectual right of professionals or cultural members to tell the stories relating to their history or the meaning of objects. The answers to these questions are not easy. In an example given by philosophy professor Hilde Hein, “Whose sense of temporal continuity should prevail...when an object is deemed by its tribal possessors to be animated by a spirit dating back a thousand years, but contemporary carbon dating identifies its manufacture within the present century?”⁸⁶ A driving objective for many museums was reliance in science which feels it necessary to have “experts” analyze the eligibility of historic sites and material objects based on that science. However, Native groups reliant on methods other than western science may find this narrow view of the world suspicious and constricting to their spiritual and historical beliefs.

In response to complications with the Antiquities Act mainly pertaining to vague definitions included in the act, Congress passed the Archaeological Resource Protection Act in 1979 (ARPA) to expand the protection efforts of archaeological sites. According to the

⁸⁶ Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2000), 42.

act, its purpose “is to secure, for the present and future benefit of the American people, the protection of archaeological resources and sites which are on public lands and Indian lands.”⁸⁷ While expanding protection of archaeological sites onto tribal lands, the act does exempt tribal communities from having to receive a permit on their own lands unless they have their own cultural resource laws that require a permit. The act also requires communication with groups affiliated with archaeological sites, a major aspect neglected in the previous legislation, and allows tribes to attach terms or conditions to the permits and materials unearthed.

There are also a number of drawbacks to the ARPA that cause concern for Native groups. For instance, with this act American Indians could only own the materials unearthed in an excavation if archaeological research happened on their own land. Additionally, while the act maintains steps toward the inclusion of tribal communities in archeological endeavors, the act still maintains that all data and material uncovered by excavations must be associated and preserved at a creditable academic institution or museum. This can be problematic for tribal groups who may not have such institutions to house the material themselves, and ultimately reinforces the authority and privilege granted to “experts,” academics, and museum professionals. Issues also arise with the rhetoric of the act itself, which considers remains and cultural material as ‘archaeological resources’ if they are at least one hundred years old.”⁸⁸ Many communities may have spiritual or moral apprehensions about ancestors being classified as “resources,” suggesting that they are stripped of their humanity and merely because sources of data about the past. Disconnect

⁸⁷ *Archaeological Resource Protection Act in 1979*, Public Law 96-95, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 93 (October 31, 1979): 721.

⁸⁸ Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Rights and Archaeology,” (1997) 69.

between dual epistemological viewpoints regarding the care of the dead remains a major point of contention in federal policies that neglect to acknowledge these concerns.

Self-Determination Policies

The era of self-determination for Indian communities since the 1970s has been controversial and by no means ideal; however, some policies worked to expand access to museums. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 revealed how the dominant society handled and judged Native religious beliefs.⁸⁹ The act required that all governmental and public agencies assess how their operations affected the religious freedom of American Indians. It states “it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiian, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rite.”⁹⁰ The act gave hope to many American Indians that they would not only regain access to sacred lands, but also the mounds of religious material that remained in museum collections. The contrary was true in many cases and as Karen Coody Cooper explained, the act “provided very little teeth in accessing and using ceremonial materials held in museums.”⁹¹ According to Copper, misunderstandings of what constitutes “sacred” often led museum professionals to believe that the objects in their

⁸⁹ *American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978*, Public Law 95-341, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 92 (August 11, 1978): 469.

⁹⁰ U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 1978, S.J. Res. 102.

⁹¹ Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 31.

collections were no longer of any value to contemporary religious practice, thus should remain in museums for preservation purposes.

Likewise, renowned historian and member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, Vine Deloria, Jr., observed the direct link between the secularity of the government and its policies of repatriation. Deloria explained that professionals often place Indian skeletons and sacred objects on unequal ground with remains from other ethnic groups, claiming that they cannot prove a continuation of a spiritual connection between the departed and living Indian nations. Deloria asserted, “Consequently, in their view, any belief *or experience* relating to the dead or to spirits of the dead is wholly superstition. Civil religion thus denies the possibility or importance of the afterlife and limits human responsibilities to tangible things we can touch.”⁹² Under the Religious Freedom Act, and other act which followed it such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), many tribes still found it difficult to “prove” to “experts” that they either still maintained a religious practice linked to the artifact or human remains and had direct afflictions with these materials and ancestral remains.

In some cases, the Religious Freedom Act created some opportunities. The ability to claim rights to lands for religious purposes opened some access to places that were previously restricted. In the case of the Seminoles in Florida, the act gave them advantage to maintain control over an excavation site that discovered ancestral remains in Hillsborough County, Florida, in 1981. The site was set aside by the Secretary of the Interior as a preserve for Seminole culture and the tribe then acquired the trust and built a cultural center and

⁹² Vine Deloria, Jr., “Secularism, Civil Religion, and the Religious Freedom of American Indians” in *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains*, Devon A. Mihesuah ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 176. (Italics in original)

museum to display the cultural material unearthed at the site and to help preserve Seminole religion and culture.⁹³ However, Tampa argued against the tribe's ability to build a cigarette shop in the same site, tribal sovereignty allowed for the construction of both the shop and the cultural center, further emphasizing the control the Seminoles then maintained over the land.

Laws meant to protect tribal rights can also raise questions over identity and the authenticity of Indian arts and crafts. Public Law 101-644, known as the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 (IACA) was designed to help protect American Indian culture by making it a federal felony to claim that material objects were "Indian" made when in fact they were not.⁹⁴ The IACA builds on the previous 1935 act, which established the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. However, the limitations of the law, which only acknowledge registered members of federally recognized tribes was problematic for Indian artists as well as museums that hold their art. In 1990, the Museum of the Five Civilized Tribes in Muskogee, Oklahoma closed because it was fearful that the materials the museum contained would not fit the requirements of the new IACA. Much of the art in the museum came from artists not formally recognized by a tribe, rendering them not "Indian" under the law. While they were sure that Native artists in fact created the materials the collection held, the museum was hesitant to become a case study for how the new law would react to their procession of the

⁹³ Twila Perkins, "Seminoles Can Chalk Up Another Win," *Seminole Tribune*, Vol. III, Iss., 6 (Sept. 9, 1985), 1, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/370816913?accountid=4485> (Accessed December 27, 2012).

⁹⁴ *American Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990*, Public Law 101-644, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 104 (November 29, 1990): 4662.

art pieces.⁹⁵ The museum did reopen, though its temporary closing reflects the problem with the law, as well as how federal law mandates Indian identity and culture which transfers into the museum setting.⁹⁶

Indian Arts and Crafts Board Act of 1990 directly addressed issues of authenticity and identity that translates into the art market and into the museum world. While the 1935 act specified “Indians” referred only to members of recognized tribes for the purposes of selling art, the 1990 revision to the act allows for tribes to certify Indian artisans who may have various degrees of ancestry but may not maintain tribal membership.⁹⁷ This serves to re-empower Native groups and gives a degree of control over recognition and the art market back to Indigenous communities. A further amendment in 2000, known as the Indian Arts and Crafts Enforcement Act of 2000, provided clearer definitions of the term “Indian product” with examples to help hinder confusion about what was “Indian art.”⁹⁸ While these acts do not extend into the non-commercial markets, such as museums, in legal terms or consequences the act does inform what museum professionals, art galleries and visitors to the institutions consider “authentic.” The Indian Arts and Crafts Act, in its various forms

⁹⁵ James Watts, “New Indian Art Law Affects Oklahomans: Act Stresses Tribal Listing” *Tulsa World*, December 8, 1990, online at <http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?no=subj&articleid=180740&archive=yes> (Accessed, Nov. 12, 2009).

⁹⁶ Kathi Thacker, “Museum Reopens as Fear of Indian Art Rule Eases,” *Daily Oklahoman*, (February 18, 1991), http://www.newsok.com/article/2347995?searched=Museum%20Reopens%20as%20Fear%20of%20Indian%20Art%20Rule%20Eases&custom_click=search (Accessed Nov. 12, 2009).

⁹⁷ *American Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990*, Public Law 101-644, U.S. Statutes at Large 104 (November 29, 1990): 4662.

⁹⁸ *Indian Arts and Crafts Enforcement Act of 2000*, Public Law 106-497, U.S. Statutes at Large 114 (November 9, 2000): 2219.

over the years has helped to protect Indian artists with the art market, and demonstrates a progression in negotiations between the federal government and Native groups.

Following World War II, bureaucrats applied a termination policy to American Indian communities that sought to remove federal governmental responsibility for Indian tribes on reservations. Many politicians viewed this movement to be a streamlining effort that would transfer Indian services, such as health care and education, from the BIA to organizations that provided similar services to the general public. Ultimately, termination served as an assimilation effort that integrated American Indians into the services and regulations of the general mainstream public. In response to this, the American Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 (P.L. 93-638) attempted to end the paternalistic relationship between federal government and Native nations.⁹⁹ Self-determination attempts to reaffirm the responsibility of the United States Government to Native nations while also establishing greater control to said Native nations over their own programs and governmental affairs. Although it is still negotiated and debated today, the act ultimately attempts to recognize tribal sovereignty and the rights of Indian nations to handle their own affairs.¹⁰⁰ Self-determination has had a dramatic effect on the growth of tribal museums across the nation as many communities view museums as institutions where they can assert their tribal sovereignty, control access to intellectual property and cultural material while also creating an economic venue toward self-sufficiency.

⁹⁹ *American Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975*, Public Law 93-638, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 88 (January 4, 1975): 2203.

¹⁰⁰ For more information on termination and self-determination policies see: Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy 1945-1960*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); or George Pierre Castile, *Taking Charge: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1975-1992* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006).

For many Native nations, their museums are symbolic and physical displays of tribal self-determination, and even sites of protest to the traditional practices of museums. As tribes are striving for economic and political self-sufficiency in more recent years, museums appear to be a mark of success. In 1995, the *Fort Apache Scout* an Apache newspaper in Arizona released an article entitled “Arizona Tribes experiencing Long-Awaited Self-Sufficiency and Political Prowess.” In it, Fort Apache Tribal Chairman Ronnie Lupe notes that tribes in Arizona “are providing jobs and college assistance for their tribal members and addressing social needs on their reservation that have been long-neglected by the federal government.” He continues, “*Tribal museums* are being planned or constructed on several reservations. New health clinics and tribal court buildings are springing up on others. The progress that is “breaking-out” on many of the reservations is often testimony to the cultural strength, wisdom, and tenacity of Indian people.”¹⁰¹ This policy seems to be encouraging the growth of tribal owned and operated institutions, but it does not always assist tribes in the struggles with non-Native institutions that still maintain control over material culture or intellectual property.

In the wake of self-determination, the Indian Gaming and Regulatory Act (IGRA) of 1988 proved controversial and a compromising factor between the federal and state governments and tribal nations. While the act has ultimately diminished tribal sovereignty by applying regulator actions that favor states over tribal sovereigns, the act has also produced a growth in Indian gaming and economic development across the country. Though seemingly unrelated, this act has also played its part in the access of tribes to cultural material and establishing their own voice within museums, in many cases offering a flow of

¹⁰¹ Ronnie Lupe, “Arizona Tribes Experiencing Long-Awaited Self-Sufficiency and Political Prowess,” *Fort Apache Scout* (Vol. 33, Iss. 20, January 20, 1995), 2.

funds to maintain a tribal museum. For instance, the Mashantucket Pequots have one of the largest and most profitable Indian casinos in the country. They utilize the revenue produced from the casino for a number of tribal institutions including a tribal museum. For the Pequots, operating their own museum was a way to protect and celebrate Pequot identity. The museum's focus on the presentation of tribal identity meant to evoke a sense of pride in tribal members as well as educate the general public in the continuation of Pequot culture in the face of adversity, making this museum possibly the most well-known example of a community museum presenting history in their own voice to the outside world.¹⁰² Having a museum makes it possible to take back authority of tribal history and culture in a museum setting. The ability to have a museum for this purpose may not be possible for the Pequots, or others, were it not for the money made from gambling. However, the drawbacks to IRGA, which undermine tribal sovereignty, make the benefits of the act questionable and the act works to both reaffirm tribal sovereignty while also allowing the state and federal government to control it.

The Indian Gaming and Regulatory Act of 1988 (IGRA) also reflects of the same kind of ideas, negotiations and compromises that occur within museums.¹⁰³ For example, tribal museums may create places for self-determination and tribal control over representations and the use of material culture, yet the framework and standards of the museum world constrict some tribal institutions from recognition as a "museum." George H.J. Abram's survey of tribal museums displayed a decrease in the number of tribal

¹⁰² For a deep exploration of how the museum presents Pequot culture through artistic representations and recreations of the past, see: John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

¹⁰³ *Indian Gaming and Regulatory Act of 1988*, Public Law 100-497, U.S. *Statutes at Large* 102 (October 17, 1988): 2467.

museums once he applied stricter guidelines of what constitutes a museum. Under guidelines stipulated by a Smithsonian professional, the number of tribal museums in America dropped from two hundred and thirty-six tribal museums down to around one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy-five.¹⁰⁴ The resistance of the museum professional world to accept many of these institutions reflects the same privilege granted to “experts” in archaeological digs and the construction of exhibitions in non-Native museums.

Museum Legislation

The American Alliance Museums’ standards for accreditation designate that the museum must have a clear mission that it works to fulfill, employ trained and educated staff members, maintain the preservation and care of collections, serve as an education and interpretive center for the public, and be financially secure.¹⁰⁵ This development creates further questions as tribal museums conform to the standards and ideals of the academic community. Similar to the compromises negotiated under IGRA in regards to gaming, the same debate of tribal sovereignty versus federal, state, or national organizational standards and regulations apply to tribal museums that do not reap the benefits of being an accredited museum if they do not shape their museums to the policies and ideals of the mainstream. The standards do not hinder tribal sovereignty since tribal museums do not have to seek accreditation; however, the force of the academic world is predominant.

¹⁰⁴ George H.J. Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2004), 3.

¹⁰⁵ American Alliance of Museums, *Accreditation Program Standards: Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum*, (January 1, 2005), <http://aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/accreditation/eligibility> (accessed January 21, 2013).

Calls for repatriation had been prevalent for years before any legislation directly addressed the issue. The Onondaga fought the New York State Museum and others for the return of wampum belts; the Zuni demanded the return of their War Gods meant to degrade in nature rather than preserved in museums. Museum professionals often refused to return sacred, ceremonial, or religious objects to tribal communities, arguing that the groups were not equipped to preserve or protect them properly.¹⁰⁶ As struggles of cultural material continued, the first piece of legislation that stipulated the return of tribal cultural material appeared in the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA) in 1989.¹⁰⁷ The primary goal of this act was to establish a new museum within the Smithsonian Institution and also called for the return of cultural material to tribal groups in the transfer of collections to the new museum, known as the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).

The majority of the collection transferred to the NMAI had an interesting and complex history regarding past American policies of excavation and collecting, pointing to a need to include a repatriation stipulation in the act. The year before the establishment of NMAI, Congress noted that the United States was in need of a national museum dedicated to American Indian cultures as proposed in the National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act.¹⁰⁸ This act called for the transfer of materials from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation to a new National Museum of the American Indian

¹⁰⁶ Bowen Blair, "Indian Rights: Native Americans Versus American Museums—A Battle for Artifacts" *American Indian Law Review*, (Vol. 7, No. 1, 1979), 128.

¹⁰⁷ *National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989*, Public Law 101-185, *Statutes at Large* 103 (November 28, 1989): 1336.

¹⁰⁸See: U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act. 100th Cong., 2nd sess., 1988. Rpt. 494.

(NMAI) in preparation for the opening of a national museum on the mall in Washington D.C.

George Gustav Heye, an elite New Yorker, maintained a large personal collection of American Indian artifacts from across the Americas in the early part of the twentieth century, funded numerous archaeological investigations, and opened a museum in New York City to house and display the hundreds of thousands of objects he possessed, which became the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. Heye sometimes obtained material contained in the collection under questionable means, though mostly legal terms under the Antiquities Act, but it nonetheless contained sacred objects in need of return. With this in mind, the act stipulated the return of such material to American Indian communities. The remainder of the collection created the base of the two National Museum of the American Indian buildings, one in New York City's old Custom House, the other on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Furthermore, the act called for a survey of *all* the museums of the Smithsonian Institution to identify all human remains or funerary objects for repatriation. The NMAIA was the first step toward repatriation acts to follow.¹⁰⁹

The NMAI act had a greater purpose than repatriation alone, and addressed the need to reexamine the representation of American Indians in museums. Congress noted that the purpose of the national museum to “advance the study of Native Americans” and “collect, preserve, and exhibit Native American Objects,” the way that this has been carried out

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Pierce Erikson, “Decolonizing the ‘Nation’s Attic’: The National Museum of the American Indian and the Politics of Knowledge-Making in a National Space,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 63.

reflects a close relationship with American Indian communities.¹¹⁰ Its intent as written by Congress was similar to those of natural history museums of the past; however, the course of the museum from the birth of NMAI would move beyond simply maintaining these basic traditional practices to incorporate cultural participation from Native communities within the museum. In order to assure this, the act mandates that at least seven of the twenty-three initial NMAI trustees have to be American Indian, and the number would increase to twelve after initial trustees expired.¹¹¹

The act provides a basis for a continual negotiation process, or “shared authority” that struggles to balance the objectives of both Native and non-Native board members and curators. However, the host institution still informs interpretation. For instance, the exhibits downplay colonization in a museum that sits on the Mall of the nation’s capital. In what Amy Lonetree describes as a “missed opportunity,” the museum appears hesitant to challenge the American master narrative, and while the museum says it focuses on survival, they do not provide a context within which visitors can understand the importance of that survival.¹¹² This was evidence of the shortcomings of the act that still maintain the objectives of the overall Smithsonian Institution and objectives of the federal government that created the act, ultimately leaving intellectual freedom in the hands of academics and “experts.” Additionally, issues concerning repatriation negotiated under the act as groups need to request the return of objects and the return of those objects remain at the discretion

¹¹⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act, 101st Congress 1st sess. 1989 Rpt. 340.

¹¹¹ Patricia Pierce Erikson, “Decolonizing the ‘Nation’s Attic’” (2008), 63.

¹¹² Amy Lonetree, “Missed Opportunities: Reflections on the NMAI,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Iss. 3, (Summer 2006), 637.

of the Smithsonian Institution.

Directly addressing the issue of repatriation in museums outside of the Smithsonian Institution, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990 that would forever change how museums interacted with American Indian communities.¹¹³ This act requires that museums inventory their collections in order to return any human remains or funerary objects to the communities from which they came, particularly to individual families, related kin, or tribal groups with a direct affiliation with the deceased. Problems with the act arose when it was difficult to trace human remains to any particular group or family. When this occurs, tribal groups have little power in ensuring reburial, as the law requires the museum hold them until they identify affiliation.¹¹⁴ Possibly the most famous of stalled repatriation cases was that concerning the Kennewick Man, a nearly complete set of human remains found on the shore of the Columbia River near the town of Kennewick, Washington. Anthropologists argued that the cultural affiliation in this case concluded without sufficient scientific evidence, prevent the repatriation of the remains to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. To date the Kennewick man remains in question, held up in legal cases and arguments over its origins and how the remains fall under the laws in NAGPRA.¹¹⁵ The Kennewick man was one extreme example

¹¹³ *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990*. Public Law 101-601, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 104 (November 16, 1990): 3048.

¹¹⁴ Joe Watkins, "The Politics of American Archaeology," (2005), 194.

¹¹⁵ For more information on the Kennewick Man see: David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) or Roger Downey, *Riddle of the Bones: Politics, Science, Race and the Story of the Kennewick Man* (New York: Copernicus Books, 2000).

of the complications and limitation of the act.

NAGPRA forced academics and museum professionals to acknowledge the concerns of Native people and in some instances created new collaborative relationships between Native people and non-Native professionals. The frustration of having to cooperate has created new animosity for some, such as archaeologist Clement W. Meighan who complains that “millions of dollars have now been spent to inventory collections, including those containing items thousands of years old...An enormous amount of scientists’ time is also being diverted from research that might otherwise be done on those bones and artifacts soon to be repatriated.”¹¹⁶ Though scientists, such as Meighan, have not defined how this knowledge was beneficial to all of human kind, they are definitive that the information gathered should be of great value to American Indian people as well since it would tell them about their ancestors. Regardless of some backlash, the act began the process of returning remains and materials to Native groups, it also opened the door for communication between professionals and American Indian communities. NAGPRA would allow for American Indian voices to enter the museum for the first time.¹¹⁷

Repatriation can also be an incentive for tribes to develop museums and repositories. In the last twenty years in particular, the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) signed into law in 1990 dictated the regulations of returning human remains

¹¹⁶ Clement W. Meighan, “Burying American Archaeology,” *Archaeological Ethics*, Karen D. Vitelli, ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996), 210.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, (101st Cong, 1st sess., 1990. H.R. 5237 Bill) and for more information on NAGPRA see Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) and Devon A. Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader: Who Owns American Indian Remains?* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

and cultural material to tribes from museums and other institutions. Under the law, tribes must prove through a variety of steps their cultural affiliation with material held in museums in order to have them repatriated. In addition to this, the act also stipulates that the Review Committee handling the repatriation can “make recommendations as to the future care of repatriated cultural items,” and in some cases, tribes’ maintaining their own repositories or museums has helped their cases in having material returned.¹¹⁸ Although many view NAGPRA as a great step forward in American Indian’s ability to have some say over cultural material held in museums, the act still demonstrates a misunderstanding of Native worldviews. It only applies to federally recognized tribes, to material found on federal lands, and can deny access to material if groups cannot prove affiliation to the committee’s standards. NAGPRA initiated more cooperation between Native and non-Native institutions, it has created new museum practices, and has influenced the increase in tribal museums and cultural centers.¹¹⁹

NAGPRA also works as a base for other objectives beyond merely pertaining to material culture. The Inter-Apache Agreement on Repatriation and the Protection of Apache Cultures was motivated to form in part due to the establishment of NAGPRA. Nine Apache tribes adopted the policy to ensure the control and protection of material and intellectual property. “Such property is defined to include: images, text, music, songs, stories, symbols, beliefs, customs, ideas, and items linked to the history and culture of the tribes in any

¹¹⁸ Jack R. Trope and Walter R. Echo-Hawk, “The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: Background and Legislative History” in *The Future of the Past: Archaeologists, Native Americans, and Repatriation*. Tamara L. Bray ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 31.

¹¹⁹ Amanda J. Cobb, “The National Museum of the American Indian as Cultural Sovereignty,” in *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations*, Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 334.

media.¹²⁰ Extending the ideas of NAGPRA beyond physical objects and human remains, some Native communities demand the return of sacred or cultural knowledge recorded by anthropologists.

Policies pertaining to American Indian cultural material and intellectual property in museums worked to both limit and expand access to those objects by the Native communities to whom they belong. After a long history of exclusion, Native communities now have some access to the museum world. Recent acts, such as NAGPRA opened doors of communication between Native communities and non-Native museum professionals. Collaboration efforts are continuing to rise, and in many cases Indian voices entered into museum exhibits and representations. Yet, the acts continue to favor the institutions over American Indians, forcing communities to “prove” by the institution or the federal government’s standards their affiliation with human remains or cultural objects. In some cases, “experts” who feel it was no longer important to the religious practice of the community can dispute the need of a sacred object for a community. As long as the law holds non-Native professionals in higher esteem than Native communities, the struggle of tribal groups to retain control over cultural resources and the telling of their own history will be a difficult one.

Federal law pertaining to tribal rights and access to cultural material still need to work to incorporate the needs Native communities. There is hope, however. Richard West says in answering why he, an Indian lawyer has become a museum director, responds that he has “given up, at least for the moment, on the Supreme Court” however, he sees great

¹²⁰ James D. Nason, “Tribal Models for Controlling Research,” *Tribal College*, Vol. VII, Iss. 2 (Oct. 31, 1996), 17. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/231685476?accountid=4485> (Accessed December 13, 2012).

potential for change within the institutions of museums.¹²¹ Museums are places of power, but they are also places of change. As debates regarding NAGPRA continue and tribes tirelessly assert their rights, there is hope that in the future that the imbalance between non-Native academics and Native communities will equalize. Within the museum world the most rapid and apparent change in practice is seen in the growing number of tribal museums across the country that are reclaiming cultural and intellectual authority and altering the meaning of the museum.

Native groups continue to argue against certain practices upheld in the policies that allow the negotiation of control over cultural objects. Tribal museums walk the line between being a “western” institution that museum professionals understand and are comfortable with, as well as being a tribal entity maintained by and for the community. As places of power, the museum model provides a means for the repatriation of objects following federal guidelines and a space for exhibitions or events that utilize cultural material in a manner that best serves the community. The drastically growing numbers of such institutions across the country in the last thirty years demonstrated that museums were appealing to Native communities. Traditional Euro-American designs for museums, shaped by western ideas about culture, are vastly different from many Native communities’ beliefs, making tribal museums different from the standard museum experience. They also offer groups a means to comply with American laws to negotiate the return of cultural materials. Tribal museums are but one method for Native communities to regain control of material culture and historical representations in museum while United States legislation that continues to navigate a path towards a shared authority.

¹²¹ W. Richard West, Jr., “From *Cherokee v. Georgia* to the National Museum of the American Indian: Images of Indian Culture,” *American Indian Law Review* (Vol. 15, No. 2, 1990-1991), 417.

CHAPTER 3

MUSEUMS PLAYING FAIR ATTEMPTING TO SHARE AUTHORITY

"The New York State Museum has determined that the historical significance of the wampum belt indicates that the belt qualifies as an object that has ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the St. Regis Band of Mohawk Indians of New York. Consultation evidence provided by representatives of the St. Regis Band of Mohawk Indians of New York; Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, Akwesasne; and Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs, Akwesasne also indicates that no individual had or has the right to alienate a community-owned wampum belt."¹²²

The history of Native material culture in museums is a complicated mix of private enterprises and governmentally sponsored endeavors. Often the lines between the two sectors blur as large private collections make their way into government sponsored institutions. In most cases, the collections date to a period from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, created during a point of compulsive collecting. The legislation discussed in the previous chapter affected both private and government collecting endeavors and shaped how material culture made its way into museums and who had access to those materials. This chapter highlights the history of three institutions that display Iroquois cultures at various levels of influence: the National Museum of the American Indian at the national level, the New York State Museum at the state level, and the Iroquois Indian Museum in Schoharie, New York at the private level. Discussing the history of each institution explains how each museum developed its Native collections, how the museum created exhibitions from those objects over time, and how each institution involves Native groups, namely the Haudenosaunee, in the development of exhibitions, programming, and research. Ultimately, the cultural environment within each museum relates to how the

¹²² Notice of Intent to Repatriate a Cultural Item: New York State Museum, Albany, New York, Federal Register Volume 69, Number 136 (Friday, July 16, 2004) <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2004-07-16/html/04-16147.htm> (Accessed November 20, 2012).

institution views its position of power that directly affect the successfulness of their ability to share authority with the communities they represent. The history of each institution examined alongside their mission statements, current exhibitions, and outreach or collaboration projects reveal the culture of each institution. This chapter demonstrates that the ability of mainstream institutions to share authority with the communities they serve is dependent on the history of the institutional culture that shapes the mission of the museum.

The Nation Sharing Authority: The National Museum of the American Indian

The current mission statement of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) specifies that the museum “is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere-past, present, and future-through partnership with Native people and others.”¹²³ In many ways, NMAI is a national standard for other museums to look to as a model for developing relationships with Native communities. NMAI certainly encouraged many other institutions to evaluate how they communicate with Native communities they represent. This is not to say that the museum does not face challenges and controversy. The roots of the museum are dramatically different from its current goals. Mostly compiled from the collection of one man, George Gustav Heye, the museum's items established a true cabinet of curiosity. For this reason, NMAI is a good representation of the institutional culture at museums established in the same manner, such as the Heard Museum and the Field Museum among others that sought to gain large collections in their early years and then transitioned their approach in more recent history.

¹²³ The mission statement is available on website for the National Museum of the American Indian at <http://nmai.si.edu/about/mission/> (accessed September 7, 2012).

The museum's transformation addressed major concerns regarding representation of Native cultures within the institution, yet the degree to which the museum actually shares its authority over the collection, exhibitions, and programming is a conflicted issue. Looking at the history of the organization and its transformation into a space attempting partnerships with Native communities expose that consultations and collaborations do not equal power sharing. Power sharing requires that the party in a position of higher power relinquish some of its control in order to achieve a balance in power between the two parties. In the case of the NMAI, the institution retains the ability to override the opinions and requests of Native groups, continuing an imbalance in power relations. Further complication arises when the museum attempts to discern who their community is; indigenous groups, the non-Native public, or both. An understanding of the various divisions within Native communities is also required in power sharing efforts since there are often various powers within a Native community, such as the three tribal governments at Akwesasne. When the museum works with Native groups, it must not alienate non-Native groups that may not be familiar with important themes or cultural symbols. The challenge of the NMAI is to collaborate with Native communities to create interpretations that are true to Native voices while simultaneously creating personal connections for non-Native visitors. The history of the culture of the institution provides some clues as to why NMAI finds partnerships challenging even though it is the mission of the museum.

George Gustav Heye developed his interest in American Indian art and material culture within the environment of the “vanishing Indian.”¹²⁴ Many professionals believed that the “inferior” or “primitive” race of American Indian people was diminishing or “vanishing” and, therefore, gathering information of these people was essential before they disappeared forever.¹²⁵ Scholars of various disciplines believed that archaeology and the collection and preservation of artifacts provided a better sense of “American” history, giving the country its own unique identity from that of anything in Europe.¹²⁶ An era of compulsive collecting of anything that connected to the original inhabitants of the Americas began. This idea remained particularly popular between 1890 and 1940, the precise time that Heye developed much of his collection. It is clear by the mere numbers of objects he collected that this philosophy of collect and preserve had some impact on his decision to acquire American Indian objects.

As a wealthy white American, Heye was able to expand his collection at a dramatic rate.¹²⁷ With such a large collection, he eventually opened his cabinets up to the public through the creation of a museum specifically designed to display the rare and unique

¹²⁴ Heye began collecting Native cultural material in 1897, a point at which the idea that Native groups were disappearing was well accepted and believed. The concept is early than this, with James Fenimore Cooper’s famous novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* published in 1829. In 1904, Edward Curtis photographed Navajos riding away on horses, which he titles “Vanishing Race.” This image helped solidify the popular view that American Indians were vanishing, an idea that lingered for decades.

¹²⁵ The term “professionals” used here to encompass archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, scientists, museum administrators and all other professions actively studying American Indian cultures.

¹²⁶ See David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), chapter 1.

¹²⁷ J. Alden Mason, *George G. Heye: 1874-1957*, Leaflets of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation: Number 6, (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1958), 8.

materials he acquired. The development of the museum represents an authoritative spirit that American Indian history, culture, and art are things to share with all Americans with the means to visit the institutions. Heye's Museum of the American Indian in New York City became a cabinet of curiosity filled to capacity of Native cultural material from across the country. His interactions with professionals also suggests that he wanted to distinguished his museum as an institution of authority on anthropology and primitive art. Like many museums of its time Heye's museum exhibited objects in display cases in large numbers with little interpretation or information. With this presentation, the museum encouraged the public to view exhibits simply as examples of the curious nature of the cultures that created them.

Heye attended Columbia University and received a degree in the newly evolving field of electrical engineering in 1896. After his graduation, he began working for the White-Crosby Company, with whom he traveled to Kingman, Arizona in 1897 as an assistant to the chief engineer. It would be at this time that he began his long interest in American Indian culture and material art due to his interaction with Navajo workers. During his ten months stay in Kingman, Heye purchased a number of objects from Navajo workers and had them shipped to his home in New York, creating a life-long fascination with American Indian art and culture. Heye's American Indian collection became a chief priority for him and consumed a majority of his thoughts and time. Heye established relationships with prominent ethnologists and archaeologists at the National Museum of Natural History, from whom he received guidance on the importance of cataloging and storing his collection. Much of his work during the creation of the museum reflects this professional influence. In 1903, he purchased his first large collection of several hundred pieces of pottery excavated in New Mexico from Harry E. Hale. Prior to this Heye purchased items piece by piece

primarily from their American Indian owners. This change was a defining moment in his transformation from collecting as a hobby to collecting as a serious enterprise in his life.¹²⁸

From this point, Heye became increasingly active in archeological endeavors and recognized this practice as a means to collect valuable information about American Indian culture. Heye and his mother would finance many of his own archaeological excavations as well as those of his colleagues' and the reports produced from those efforts. Not a collector herself, Heye's mother supplied sufficient support to her son's hobby in the form of generous donations to his projects. The number of excavations they funded continued to grow and with it grew Heye's collections of ancient arts, primarily from the American Southwest and South America. His impulse to collect led to his arrest in 1914 for grave robbing a Munsee-Delaware site.¹²⁹ His arrest proved only a minor setback to his collecting addiction, and Heye unrelentingly fed an already large collection of objects through numerous archaeological projects. Ancient groups that were uncovered through these archeological projects were Heye's primary interest, like many of his contemporaries. Though Heye's interests in Native cultures began with purchasing objects from their American Indian owners, an act that recognizes the contemporary lives of peoples who created them, they shifted to an interest only in the past or ancient cultures the more he focused on becoming "professional" in his pursuits.

Heye's drive to collect reflects his recognition that the information gained from examining and preserving these objects was part of his civic duty, as well as his own want to achieve a social status of owning a large collection. Many of Heye's contemporaries echoed

¹²⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 15.

the attitude of collecting out of civic duty for the preservation of human knowledge before it vanished, such as Dwight and Mae Heard of the Heard Museum in Phoenix, or Mary Cabot Wheelwright of the Wheelwright Museum in Santa Fe, among others of the time.¹³⁰ The size of the collection varied by collector, but the quality of objects and information collected was of the utmost importance. Like many collectors of the era, the feeling of responsibility to share the objects and knowledge with the public, along with the need to find a larger space to store their collections, drove many like the Heards, Wheelwright, and G.G. Heye to create museums. These institutions housed the collections and offered the opportunity for each to educate the public. In almost all cases, the “public” in mind was a non-Native public. Many collectors developed relationships with the people they collected from, yet when creating exhibitions in their cabinets in museums, none envisioned the Native communities visiting the museum as a public to educate.

Heye’s mother left him a large inheritance upon her death in 1915, money Heye used to make the plans for a new museum for his growing collection. Heye acquired a location from a close friend in Washington Heights in New York, a residential area with great promise for the new museum.¹³¹ On May 10, 1916, Heye had signed the final paper work that created the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation and Heye became the chairman for its Board of Directors. The official opening of the galleries did not occur until 1922. Between the founding of the museum in 1916 and the opening of its doors in 1922, the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation produced the *Indian Notes and*

¹³⁰ See Shepard Krech III and Barbara A. Hail, eds., *Collecting Native America, 1870-1960* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

¹³¹ Roland W. Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian: The Heye & The Mighty* (Honolulu: Mechas Press, 1999), 8.

Monographs series, released quarterly, and alerted board members and other interested parties on the current excavations underway, including the newly acquired objects to the collection.¹³² These publications would continue to run sporadically between 1919 and 1973 giving a detailed account of all archaeological work conducted for the museum.

The *Indian Notes and Monographs* include its miscellaneous collection, which published projects that did not fit into a predetermined category, including three detailed guides to the collections on display in the museum in 1920. A disclaimer at the beginning of the guide was sure to indicate to the reader that what was on display was only a fraction of the total objects held by the museum; presumably to demonstrate how large the collection was since each display case was filled to capacity.¹³³ The exhibition arranged material by geographic location rather than by tribal designations and the guides clearly indicate that on display are only the most “important” groups of each area. The objects presented in the cases are often times labeled as the “best example” or a “rare” and “interesting” piece.¹³⁴ Former director the Museum of the American Indian, Roland W. Force suggests that Heye was always a collector first, never trained as a scholar, which highly influenced the way in which he built his collection.¹³⁵ This “collector” attitude was distinct in the way the display of the collections and the descriptions of the guide as Heye tends to focus on objects that are the oldest or the rarest instead of pieces that reveal the most information about the culture. Heye had a strict

¹³² See Mary Jane Lenz, “George Gustav Heye: The Museum of the American Indian” in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, Duane Blue Spruce ed., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic, 2004), 96.; Mason, *George G. Heye* (1958), 17.

¹³³ George G. Heye, Ed., *Indian Notes and Monographs: Miscellaneous Vols. 30-31*, (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation 1922).

¹³⁴ Heye, Ed., *Indian Notes and Monographs* Vol. 31 (1922), 16.

¹³⁵ Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian* (1999), 6.

rule that all objects had to be “old” and he would never accept “tourist” material.¹³⁶ Heye was skeptical of material that American Indian communities made to sell on roadsides or for the strict purpose of making a profit. To Heye, these materials could never possess the same elevated quality as those made for use within the community. He limited his interests to authentic material, either aesthetically pleasing or those that served some important function within the society that produced it. The museum was a way for Heye to show off his ever-expanding collection to impress and intimidate his competitors, who were often also his friends. Under the guise of civic duty, education of the public, and preservation for science, Heye grew his collection and stuffed as many objects as possible into display cases.¹³⁷

The fact that Heye maintained such close ties to anthropologists, archaeologists and other scholars of American Indian culture presents an interesting element in the development of his museum. While his bias manifest in the types of objects he collected, he seemed to find it important to have his institution produce scholarship as well. Combined with his skepticism of contemporary Native art, it is evident that Heye held a higher respect for professionals studying the cultures than the cultures themselves. The *Indian Notes and Monographs* series allowed a medium for professionals to publish their findings in the field while remaining a reflection of Heye’s endeavors and institution. While the guides noted information uncovered by these scholars, they are at a constant struggle with Heye’s own bias and focus. At times, it is difficult to determine where the scholarship ends and Heye’s glorification of objects begins. For example, in an article about Pottery found in Southern California, Heye noted, “it was only after continued urging of ten years, that the first piece, a

¹³⁶ Lenz, “George Gustav Heye” (2004), 105.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 107 and Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian* (1999), 10.

mortuary olla found in a cave, was brought in by one of them [a member of the Native group in the area].”¹³⁸ Prior to presenting the information uncovered in the excavation, Heye lists the “fine specimens” that made it into the collection of the Museum of the American Indian, indicating a focus on the objects rather than the scholarship.¹³⁹ His article acknowledges that the Native groups in the area “regarded the handling of them [the pottery] with more or less superstitious dread” yet Heye continued to ask for access to the objects for ten years, showing a disregard for the concerns of the community in the name of collecting. One could argue that his actions are reflective of the entirety of scholarship on American Indians at this time, driven by a fascination and glorification of an “other.” White Americans captured cultures through the collection of material objects and then developed the interpretation of them to fit their own uses. There was a need for EuroAmerica to capture the American Indian past as its own, in order to create a long or ancient American history. This manufactured narrative, however, excluded those still living in American Indian cultures so that America could claim the American Indian past for itself. Little, if any, collaborative efforts with Native groups proved necessary for Heye’s museum and others like it in order to expand collections. Wealthy Americans maintained the luxury of purchasing as much as they could afford a difference from state-run institutions, which operated on a budget and needed to build relationships with Native groups in order to expand collections.

¹³⁸ George Gustav Heye, “Certain Aboriginal Pottery from Southern California,” *Indian Notes and Monographs: A Series of Publications to the American Aborigines* Vol. VII, No. 1 (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1919), 8.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation changed little change during George G. Heye's life. Even after his death in 1957, progress remained slow to realize due to financial turmoil and political roadblocks. The museum faced a lack of funds that were depleting at a rate of \$25,000 per year.¹⁴⁰ The museum also began to recognize that its once prime location was beginning to decline, which made it increasingly hard for them to attract visitors. While many businesses in New York City were beginning to find locations out of the city due to an overall economic decline of the area, the MAI was determined to stay within the city limits.¹⁴¹ A search for a new location in lower Manhattan consumed much of the staff's focus in the late 1970s. Following a successful temporary exhibit at New York City's Alexander Hamilton Custom House by the MAI, the building presented a perfect new location of the museum. Along with exchanges with the mayor and other city officials to organize the transfer of the museum, then director Roland Force was also concerned with the feelings of American Indian communities on the change in location. Force recognized that the Custom House may seem "daunting to Indians" and he wanted to be sure it would not receive large disapproval from American Indians.¹⁴² In his concern, Force demonstrated a beginning of consideration for the living communities the museum represented. Many involved, however, felt the location served as a place where guests to New York City could learn nearly the entire history of the United State through their visits to the Statue of Liberty, Castle Clinton, Federal Hall, and the Customs House with American Indian exhibitions. It would take a number of years of political maneuvering before the museum moved to the

¹⁴⁰ Force, *Politics and the Museum of the American Indian* (1999), 37.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 83.

Custom House. The new museum location would not only change its place in the city, but would also create a new interpretation of the objects in the collection.

The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation finally received a dramatic transformation in the late 1980s. In 1988, Congress noted that the United States was in need of a national museum dedicated to American Indian cultures as proposed in the National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act.¹⁴³ This act called for the transfer of materials from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation to a new National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in preparation for the opening of a national museum on the mall in Washington D.C. This act would also maintain the current location of the MAI in New York City's old Custom House. While Congress noted that the purpose of the national museum would be to "advance the study of Native Americans" and "collect, preserve, and exhibit Native American Objects," the way that this carried out reflects a close relationship with American Indian communities.¹⁴⁴ Its intent as written by Congress was similar to those of natural history museums of the past; however, the course of the museum from the birth of NMAI would move beyond simply maintaining these basic traditional practices to incorporate cultural participation in the museum as well.

Since the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in 1994 in New York City, the institution proclaims its dedication to working with Native communities in the preservation, interpretation, and representation of American Indian material culture and art. Roland W. Force, noted that the new National Museum of the American Indian, George

¹⁴³See, U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act. 100th Cong., 2nd sess., 1988. Rpt. 494.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. National American Indian Museum and Memorial Act, 101st Congress 1st sess. 1989 Rpt. 340.

Heye Center symbolically returned the objects once held in George Heye's possession to the descendants of those who created them.¹⁴⁵ The museum's mission since the opening of the NMAI in the Alexander Hamilton Customs House in lower Manhattan included collaboration with American Indian communities to carry out the goals originally distinguished by Congress. The museum also recognizes its responsibility to educate the public not only on the history of American Indians in North America, but to also provide a means to learn about the contemporary lives of these communities and to demonstrate that they have not vanished as previously predicted.

The National Museum of the American Indian has been concerned with incorporating Native voices into its interpretation since the planning of the new facilities in the early 1990s. The collection that George G. Heye had worked his whole life to build, with little in mind other than preserving the materials for his own collection, transformed to represent multiple meanings interpreted for guests. Consultation meetings occurred with tribal members and leaders throughout the country to ensure the presentation of that their voices to audiences on the importance and meaning of each piece. In order to ensure that the professional working world of the institution maintains a connection with Native communities, the NMAI ensures that all boards and planning committees have an even distribution of Native and non-Native members. The NMAI itself has always had a Native director, W. Richard West, Jr., who is a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma, and now Kevin Gover, who is a member of the Pawnee tribe. The institution

¹⁴⁵ Force, *The Heye and the Mighty* (1999), 463.

strives for a balance where American Indian voices can tell their own stories without completely alienating non-Native professionals.¹⁴⁶

It terms of design, the NMAI, George Gustav Heye Center in lower Manhattan was an interesting contrast, since it was located within the traditional United States governmental style customs house. The center of the building maintained its traditional form, while the exhibits for the museum surround it, presenting a large array of material from pre-contact periods all the way through contemporary art. The building on the mall in Washington D.C. has an even more interesting story and it went through a painstaking process of years of consultation with American Indian groups from all over the country in order to ensure that the design used their input. Johnpaul Jones, who was on the team of designers, notes that they would go out into Indian communities in order to ensure free conversation on the topic instead of making tribal members come to Washington D.C., a place many do not trust.¹⁴⁷ Architects Douglas Cardinal and Johnpaul Jones spent countless hours in consultation with Native groups to ensure that the design of the facility in Washington would be one that could reflect all the indigenous groups of America. As Jones notes, many American Indians he spoke with wanted to be sure that there was “some of us (American Indians)” in the building, both in the design and with the representations within its walls.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ George Horse Capture, “The Way of the People” in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, Duane Blue Spruce, ed., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic, 2004), 31.

¹⁴⁷ Johnpaul Jones, “We Want Some of Us in that Building” in *Spirit of a Native Place: Building the National Museum of the American Indian*, Duane Blue Spruce, ed., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic, 2004), 70.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

Despite all its efforts, the museum retains fundamental challenges regarding its audience. In 2008, a number of Native and non-Native scholars and museum professionals contributed to *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversation*, to discuss the successes and failures of the institution. Published by the University of Nebraska press, the volume was an unbiased look at the museum's practices. Many of these author's suggest that the museum struggles to identify its audience. The museum touts the ability of the museum to challenge a traditional museum practice of maintaining a singular voice of authority. A primary practice of sharing authority in the museum was the practice of bringing on Native community members to act as curators for exhibitions representing their communities. Patricia Peirce Erikson pointed out, "One of the fundamental challenges posed by the Native community-based narratives embedded within the NMAI is a reflection on the nature of knowledge itself and what counts as valid knowledge or as a valid knowledge-maker and curator."¹⁴⁹ Erikson argues that the community-based narratives in the museum challenge conventional western ways of communicating through exhibitions. Though she was primarily advocating that Native voices in NMAI count as "valid knowledge-makers" through these programs, one could question who within the Native community retains the authority to serve as a representative for the entire group as a curator to the NMAI.

In developing the "Our Lives" exhibit at the museum, the institution requested the assistance from communities presented in the exhibit. According to Cynthia Chavez Lamar, who was involved in the process, communities established committees of representatives to help construct the exhibits. Lamar noted that the meetings of the committees often included

¹⁴⁹ Patricia Peirce Erikson, "Decolonizing the "Nation's Attic": The National Museum of the American Indian and the Politics of Knowledge-Making in a National Space," *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversation* Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 68.

conflicting opinions of those on the committee, where some wished to discuss sensitive issues, others did not want them exposed to a national audience. In an instance when Lamar presented a narrative about the education of youth she developed from information shared during a meeting, the Yakama co-curators decided not to include it in the exhibit. In this act, Lamar noted, “they recognized they directed the exhibit content development, and I realized as a museum curator that decisions were not always up to the NMAI even though some topics might make for intriguing exhibit text and insight to Native identity.”¹⁵⁰ In this instance of power sharing, the co-curators determined what to include in the exhibition with the audience that would be viewing it in mind. In order to prevent exposing sensitive or difficult aspects of contemporary life to non-Native viewers, they prevented the information from being included in the exhibit, and the NMAI respected that decision.¹⁵¹

As an insider to exhibition development at the NMAI, Lamar noted that the decision making process revealed an unequal division of power, if only for logistical reason. “I recognized that power and authority were at play,” Lamar recalled, “with the NMAI having all the power yet the community curators seemingly granted all the authority to make decisions, but only when the NMAI presented them with the opportunity...”¹⁵² Co-Curators were not a part of every decision due to their proximity; they were not full-time staff nor easily accessible to come to the museum. She further noted that much of the differences in opinions between the co-curators and the curators at the NMAI had to do with expectations

¹⁵⁰ Cynthia Chavez Lamar, “Collaborative Exhibit Development at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian,” *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversation* Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 148.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 153.

of the visitor experience. When ideas appeared too complex, too long, or too boring for the average visitor, the staff changed them for greater accessibility to a diverse audience, resulting in a simplified exploration of the cultures. Some Native community members noted that they desired the presentation of more truths in the exhibitions as opposed to a glorified representation of the people. The attempt to share authority with the community also followed practices traditionally set by the museum world, with predetermined outlines and objectives for each display of community that led to exhibitions that represent a culture based on the questions asked of community groups instead of allowing the community to develop its own themes for the exhibit. All of this was to juggle the different audiences of the museum. As Ira Jacknis noted, “even if it is largely staffed by Natives and many of its programs are for Natives, as a national institution it has to speak to the entire nation and world.”¹⁵³ In an institution striving for a shared authority with Native communities, the museum struggles to determine how to create narratives that speak to even community.

The NMAI continues to collect, paying homage to the late George Gustav Heye’s passion for American Indian material culture. Perhaps most different from Heye’s earlier model is the emphasis on culture instead of on objects. Particularly, living and thriving cultures. Much of what enters into the collection today comes from contemporary artists, many of whom produce works outside of the traditional style. Modern and eclectic works, painting, sculpture, photography, film, and performance come together with weaving, beadwork and pottery arts, creating a unique atmosphere of old and new art forms. The balance of contemporary and traditional proclaims that not only are American Indian

¹⁵³ Ira Jacknis, “A New Thing?: The National Museum of the American Indian in Historical and Institutional Perspective,” *The National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversation* Amy Lonetree and Amanda J. Cobb, eds., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 32.

cultures alive, but that they are evolving in much the same way that mainstream America changes. An interactive website that brings exhibits to life through film, photography, and audio clips allows the museum to reach a large audience in the hopes of educating them about American Indian cultures. Though the museum finds its base in George Gustav Heye's life work of collecting, the messages and themes produced today reflect an institution that attempts to work closely with the Native groups as a national example of collaboration. Adding Native voice to the interpretation and presenting themes that are more contemporary is not equivalent to sharing authority with the communities the museum serves on a deep level. *Sharing* authority requires a balance of power and the acknowledgment of both parties involved in the process on equal terms. Hiring consultant curators from the communities does not mean that the museum has to listen, and a museum on the National Mall is careful about the stories it tells that may shine negatively on the National Government that funds it. The institutional culture at NMAI, created by its collections' history and its establishment as a national museum funded by the U.S. government, prevent the museum from fully sharing authority with its communities.

The State Sharing Authority: The New York State Museum

The New York State Museum maintains a long history as a research institution with an emphasis on the hard sciences. The founding of the museum in 1836, established the institution as the State Geological and Natural History Survey. Throughout the history of the museum, the scientific endeavors remained the primary focus of the institution. Early annual reports from the museum focus only on geology, paleontology, and botany primarily.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ See *Bulletin of the New York State Museum of Natural History*, Vol. I, No. 2 (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen & Sons, 1887); *Bulletin of the New York State Museum of Natural History*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen & Sons, 1888).

Marking the centennial of the institution, botanist C. Stuart Gager notes in *Scientific Monthly* that when he uses the term “museum” throughout his article it “is used to designate a natural science museum, as distinguished from those of art, history, commerce, etc.”¹⁵⁵ Throughout his discussion of the history of the institution, Gager only points to its scientific and research endeavors, and ignores entirely any discussion of the human history in the state. The focus on science and research continues to the modern day. The mission statement reads:

“The New York State Museum is a major research and educational institution. It is dedicated to promoting inquiry and advancing knowledge in the fields of geology, biology, anthropology, and history, through the investigation of material evidence germane to New York State's past, present and future. The Museum shares this knowledge through exhibits and other means with wide and diverse audiences. It encourages these audiences to take delight in learning by participating in the discovery process central to its work.”¹⁵⁶

The mission statement of the museum today indicates a focus on science, but also a desire to include the public in the process of the museum by indicating that the museum wants guests to “take delight in learning by participating.” Highlighting the participation of audiences as one of its main goals demonstrate that the museum recognizes the importance of community voices in the museum process.

Looking at early museum annual reports and Gager’s analysis, demonstrates that exhibitions were not only a secondary mission of the museum, but that they were to be used to disseminate all the information researched in the museum to the public. The focus of the museum today continues to be the “dissemination of information” suggesting that it continues to view itself as the authority with highly educated staff researching for hours,

¹⁵⁵ C. Stuart Gager, “The New York State Museum,” *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 1938), 72.

¹⁵⁶ The New York State Museum’s current mission statement is available on their website: <http://www.oce.nysed.gov/ctl/museum/museum.htm> (Accessed November 10, 2012).

days, and months on end in order to present that information to the public. Based on the exhibits, the museum struggles with how to communicate that information to the communities of New York. Many temporary exhibits display various objects from the collection that may or may not relate to the overall theme of the exhibit. For example, one wall presents sections for curators in the museum to display something of interest to them. Since the museum has curators in numerous disciplines, the result was a row of objects that have little if any connection with one another. Labels provide little clarity, noting the material, artist or maker, and a date without explanation regarding its significance to the rest of the exhibit.¹⁵⁷ In one respect, this exhibit offers a window into the elements of the museum collection the staff find most interesting, providing a bit of transparency to who they are and how they think about the museum. Yet, if the exhibit made stronger connections between the objects in the display in may be more effective at engaging visitors on a deeper level. The public may not make the connection that the museum was trying to reveal more about its staff by being open about their interests unless they are told the purpose of such an exhibit. A museum that has difficulty talking *to* the public cannot reach the next step of talking *with* the public, particularly those communities and cultures they present in the museum.

Despite the institutions long history emphasizing scientific research, or perhaps due to that emphasis, the museum began ethnological pursuits in its infancy. In 1847, the New York State Cabinet of Natural History (what would become the New York State Museum) expanded its focus to include a historical and antiquarian collection. In addition to collecting geological and botanical samples, the institution recognized a need to bring American Indian

¹⁵⁷ Observations of the exhibits made by the author during a field visit to the New York State Museum on August 27 and 28, 2012.

cultural material into the collection. The state issued a public request via a circular for Native items and Lewis Henry Morgan, a lawyer at the time with personal ties to the Iroquois (Seneca in particular), offered a number of items. Finding Morgan's submissions exemplary, The State of New York requested more items. Morgan requested funding from the state to conduct fieldwork to collect ethnographic objects in a similar fashion to the way the geological and botanical surveys a few years prior. The Regents hired Morgan in 1848 to conduct the survey, which drove him to spend over a year gathering materials in the field. Morgan would eventually contribute over 500 ethnological items to the Cabinet that became the foundation of the NYSM Ethnology Collection. In addition, Morgan also contributed linguistic and cultural knowledge he gathered in the field along with maps of archaeological sites. During his survey, Morgan became acquainted with the Parker family of the Tonawanda Seneca reservation with whom he continued a life-long correspondence following his work. Morgan took the time to understand the culture that created the objects. He eventually published his work in the first study of the Iroquois conducted by a scientifically trained observer, *The League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois*, which he published in 1851.¹⁵⁸ Morgan eventually became famous for his work with the Haudenosaunee and his contributions to ethnology and anthropology.

Morgan's work building the collection at the New York State Museum follows a similar pattern of compulsive collecting seen in other museums. During his involvement with the museum, he traveled throughout New York to ask members of Native communities to either sell or create objects for the museum. Morgan often gave direction regarding the types of object he wished to collection, but he relied on the advice and expertise of the

¹⁵⁸ Lewis Henry Morgan, *The League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (Rochester: Sage & Brother, Publishers, 1851).

communities. A report to the Regents in 1850 notes that the Regents could not hesitate at Morgan's offer to go into the field for collection since, "so rapid, indeed, is the progress of change, with the ancient lords of the soil, that what is to be done must be done quickly."¹⁵⁹ Both Morgan and the Regents address concerns that Native communities were rapidly changing and were losing important cultural elements that needed gathering before they disappeared. The museum, like many throughout the country, was concerned about the idea of the vanishing Indian.¹⁶⁰ Morgan's entire endeavor was a complicated mix of asserting authority and sharing authority on the part of the museum professionals. On the one hand, they created the project to assert their authority as professionals in the act of collecting and claiming ownership over cultural material in the name of science. This concept presumes that the museum will do a better job of preserving the culture than the members of the Native communities who would allow them to disappear. At the same time, sending Morgan out into the field working with living communities permitted for communication between the two parties, and Native communities could decide what to sell or recreate, allowing for a degree of shared authority. Perhaps it was that Morgan allowed for this degree of shared authority since he was concerned about getting to know people within Native communities

¹⁵⁹ Third Annual Report of the Regents of the University on the Condition of the State Cabinet of Natural History and the Historical and Antiquarian Collection, Made to the Senate, January 11, 1850, (Albany: Weed, Parson & Co., Public Printers, 1850), 10.

¹⁶⁰ William M. Beauchamp, "Aboriginal Occupation of New York," in *Bulletin of the New York State Museum*, Vol. 7, No. 32 (Albany: University of the State of New York, February 1900), 21. Beauchamp makes reference to the "remnants of the Indian stock which still exists in the state," in discussing contemporary Native occupants possessing no knowledge of an art form found in historic graves, indicating both population decrease and a distance from past indigenous communities.

and was concerned for their welfare. This objective and care was clear in Morgan's work.¹⁶¹ It is more difficult from the documents to determine if the Regents were interested in the Native groups of the state beyond specimens for scientific research.

Throughout his work with the Iroquois throughout the state, Morgan went beyond simply collecting items; he learned the Seneca dialect of the Iroquoian language and documented cultural interactions. When he presented his report of new acquisitions to the collection in 1850 to the Regents, he not only listed the items collected but also included the Seneca name adding linguistics in his descriptions. Morgan recognizes the importance of material culture beyond items serving as curiosities. In his book, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee* he remarks. "The fabrics of a people unlock their social history. They speak a language which is silent, but yet more eloquent than the written page. As memorials of former times they communicate directly with the beholder, opening the unwritten history of the period they represent, and clothing it with perpetual freshness."¹⁶² He laments that through the innovation of time that many of the early more primitive arts no longer exists and that "many of the inventions of the earlier Iroquois are still preserved among their descendants...but that portion of them which would especially serve to illustrate the condition of the hunter life have passed beyond our reach."¹⁶³ Throughout Morgan's work, it was clear that he was also concerned with documenting the culture, as it existed in present in order to be sure the preservation of information before new influences altered the

¹⁶¹ See Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Tonawanda Senecas' Heroic Battle Against Removal: Conservative Activist Indians* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). Hauptman discusses Morgan's role in assisting the Seneca in their fight to retain their land and demonstrates Morgan's relationship and collaboration with the Seneca.

¹⁶² Morgan, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (1851), 347.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

community again. Through his friendship with the Parker family of the Seneca reservation, Morgan was able to gain a better understanding of the Iroquois and their social structure. He developed a close relationship with Ely S. Parker whose brother's grandson, Arthur C. Parker, would eventually become New York State's first archaeologist.

Regardless of his own professional pursuits and Morgan's strives in ethnology and anthropology, the Regents and the Cabinet of Natural History focused on the objects and bringing material into the collection. In reports to the Regents that included a section for historical and antiquarian collections, Morgan contributed lists of items with the Iroquoian names and often accompanying sketches. Sometimes he would include a bit of information regarding the construction of the piece or its use, but these were usually basic descriptions. What the reports do not include was any cultural significance or context for the objects listed. While Morgan included this information in his research, it is clear by the documents that the Regents were not as concerned with the context of the collection as the objects themselves. This limited scope of understanding the collection is not restricted to the Iroquoian collection. All the other departments within the museum provide only lists of objects as well, speaking to an institution-wide focus on numbers and types of material rather than the meaning of collections for educational purposes. This falls in line with the "cabinets of curiosity" early model of museums, which packed exhibitions with items but little explanation. In this early model, even the method of speaking *to* the public became problematic as little description actually contributed to making Native cultures into others. Museums led the non-Native public to focus on how the objects look or appear different from their own rather than understanding the cultural, social, and political elements that may link the visitor and the Native groups displayed in common human experience.

After Morgan's initial development of the collection, the museum ceased adding to the collection for a number of years, mainly due to the lack of interest in American Indian material culture by James Hall who became the director when the Cabinet of Natural History transformed into the New York State Museum of Natural History. Hall resigned in 1894, and shortly after the museum turned some focus back to ethnology. The state legislature passed an act in 1896 that created an American Indian section of the museum to have a permanent exhibit space for the ethnology collection.¹⁶⁴ The primary use of the collection over the years has been for use in exhibitions. For this reason, the manner in which the museum displayed the items was perhaps more important than its use as a research collection. It is a great collection in which to examine how the museum communicates with its audience in addition to the museum's collaboration efforts with Native groups for nearly the entire history of the institution. A photograph of a display prior to 1911 of Iroquois basketry shows a tight conglomeration of baskets and basket making materials without any labels. It resembles many other early cabinet cases stuffed with material and little communication of meaning.

The manner of display in the early years of American Indian exhibitions was simply a product of their time, as this manner of display was standard. The processes of displaying as much as possible with little description occurred across exhibitions of all disciplines and one should not assume the museum was treating their ethnology collection poorly compared to other exhibits. What is interesting about the New York State Museum in this early period, is that they were making some strides in collaboration with Native communities. Arthur C.

¹⁶⁴ Elisabeth Tooker, *Lewis H. Morgan on Iroquois Material Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 82.

Parker, a Seneca, joined the museum staff as the State's first archaeologist in 1905.¹⁶⁵ Parker would continue to collect and perform ethnographic research in the same manner as Morgan, but he would change the interpretation of objects. He often took objects out in the field and captured posed photographs of them in use by the communities that created them in order to provide museum guests and researchers with a better understanding of how they fit into the culture. These images provided a deeper means of communication with the public, and also provided another avenue for involvement with the Native communities. Parker's reports to the Regents in the Museum Bulletins also display greater description and context for the objects he brought into the collection. His reports also create a more human connection to the material culture. Parker, serving as a negotiator between the museum professionals and the communities created degree of authority sharing through his endeavors to increase the amount of research material entering the museum.

The Iroquois ethnographic collection, and therefore the exhibits, changed dramatically after a disastrous fire on March 29, 1911. The fire tragically destroyed most of the museum's holdings and a majority of the items Morgan collected. Arthur Parker reported to the Regents that the "archaeological and ethnological collections of the State Museum were almost totally destroyed by fire and water."¹⁶⁶ He explains that about 50 of the objects from Morgan's collection survived because they were in the archaeologist's office for study and not in the path of the flames. From approximately 10,000 objects in the Ethnology and Archaeology exhibit, only 1500 remained after the fire, though the ordeal damaged most that

¹⁶⁵ For a biography on Arthur C. Parker, see: Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, *Inheriting the Past: The Making of Arthur C. Parker and Indigenous Archaeology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

¹⁶⁶ Eight Report of the Director of the Science Division: Including the 65th Report of the State Museum, New York State Museum Bulletin 158, (Albany, University of the State of New York, 1912), 71.

survived. This disastrous event for the museum limited the number of available pieces for display, and so Morgan's collection continued to see a great deal of use in exhibitions.

Morgan's collection stocked the exhibits that opened in the new home for the museum in the State Education Building when it opened in 1916.

The new museum location provided a space to create a new exhibit from the objects that remained in the collection. Since 1908, Arthur Parker actively pursued the creation of dioramas of Iroquois village life that strove for accuracy and required the assistance of a number of members of the Iroquois Nations. Luckily, the fire spared the elements for display completed by 1911 that would make up the bulk of the museum's holdings in Native material following the destruction.¹⁶⁷ The museum commissioned Henri Marchand and Casper Mayer to cast figures for the dioramas using members of the Nations and Parker hired a number of artisans living on the reservations to make the clothing and other items for the displays.¹⁶⁸ In the eight-year span of planning for the exhibitions, Parker takes a number of field visits to each of the communities represented in his dioramas, meeting with the artists he employed and gathering more information and cultural material for his displays. He embedded the creation of his displays in a firm grounding in ethnological practice, and there was no separation at all between the research and what made its way into the display. That is not to say that there were no conflicts in the creation of the dioramas. The correspondence between Parker and the director of the State Museum, John Clarke, reveals

¹⁶⁷ Arthur C. Parker to F.F. Thompson, March 29, 1911, Parker Files, Folder 2, New York State Museum Anthropology Files, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

¹⁶⁸ See Correspondence between John M. Clarke and Arthur C. Parker, April 16-19, 1909 and Agreement between John M. Clarke, Director of the State Museum and Henri Marchand, June 26, 1913, in Parker Files, Folder 1, New York State Museum Anthropology Files, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

that this practice was sometimes a challenge for Parker, as Clarke could be impatient about the number of site visits or why Parker insisted that the artisans do their work on the reservation instead of making them travel to the museum.¹⁶⁹ The struggles over authority in this case are clear, as Clarke would like to have the commissioned work observed in house, while Parker recognized the importance of allowing the contacted artisans to complete their work in a familiar space that allowed for an authenticity of creation.

In 1911, Parker explains to donor, Mrs. F.F. Thompson, that he “wants this to be – and it should be – the paramount display of Iroquois culture and the tangible record of the Iroquois Confederacy.” He continues, “This whole project is rather close to my heart – if it is to bear and honored name the Iroquois Collection of the State Museum ought to be beyond comparison in fullness and adequacy.”¹⁷⁰ His efforts were not in vain and Parker’s dioramas became a leading example for displaying Native cultures in museums once they opened for viewing in 1916. Impressive for the detail in each group, Parker strove to ensure that the dioramas expressed an accurate view of Iroquois culture in order to educate those viewing them. He was clear that only someone that truly understood and worked closely with the communities on the reservations could have completed such work. When asked to reflect on his work making the dioramas in 1936, Parker insists, “It ought to be perfectly clear that no one excepting one trained in ethnology and familiar with the reservations and

¹⁶⁹ John M. Clarke to Arthur C. Parker, April 30, 1912., and John M. Clarke to Arthur C. Parker, December 9, 1911, Parker File Folder 2, New York State Museum Anthropology Files, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur C. Parker to F.F. Thompson, January 4, 1911. Parker File Folder 9, New York State Museum Anthropology Files, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

their people could have conceived of these groups or supervised their construction.”¹⁷¹

Through the entire project, Parker maintained close connections with the Nations, and since he alone supervised the work, he acted as a negotiator between the museum and the Iroquois. Parker’s efforts mark an early effort in shared authority, one that unfortunately, the New York State Museum lost sight of following Parker’s departure from the institution.

Direct involvement by American Indians in the New York State Museum ended when Parker leaves in 1925, ending an era of collaboration with communities in the development of the museum. Since Parker’s tenure, a complete restructuring of the museum into a governmental office under the state education department, created a hierarchy that limited the ability of anyone within the museum to work at the same level of collaboration reflected in Parker’s work. The life group dioramas remained until the museum changed locations; however, there is no evidence of efforts by the museum to reach out to communities in the same fashion as Parker’s work in the period between his departure and the arrival of prominent Iroquois ethnologist, William Fenton. Before Fenton became the museum director in 1953, paleontologists, geologists, archaeologists, and ecologists dominated the role. Fenton served as director of the State Museum from 1953-1968. Fenton dedicated his life work to studying the Iroquois, an endeavor that earned him respect among scholars and Iroquois people. Yet Fenton also fought against the return of wampum belts to Iroquois communities during and after his tenure as director, claiming that the New York State Museum provided better preservation conditions for the collection. In 1971, he wrote a long article for the American Philosophical Society arguing that in the 1890s, the Onondaga legally transferred the wampum belts into the custody of the museum, and despite their

¹⁷¹ Arthur C. Parker to Alvin G. Whitney, January 22, 1936, Parker File Folder 17, New York State Museum Anthropology Files, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

recent claims for their return due to their cultural and religious significance, that the museum professional could better serve the preservation needs of the belts. Fenton argues, “To ignore history and satisfy the demands of the moment is to turn our backs on the responsibility for preserving the wampum belts.”¹⁷² Fenton noted that at the end of the nineteenth century that the Onondaga chiefs felt the NYSM was the safest place for the belts, and that contemporary chiefs have “evidently changed their minds about the trusteeship.”¹⁷³ In the particular case of the five belts, the New York legislature passed an act to amend the wampum law and returned the belts in question to the Onondaga contingent upon them creating an appropriate facility to house them. The Regents and Museum strongly opposed this act, and Fenton maintained, “The return of even a portion of the New York State wampum collection to the Onondaga chiefs poses a threat to the integrity of museum collections everywhere.”¹⁷⁴ From this account, it is clear that New York State Museum and the Onondaga chiefs were not in a process of collaboration or even understood the rationale of the other. Fenton’s position indicates a higher value placed on the museum’s ability to preserve something he viewed to be “one of the state’s, if not the nation’s, great cultural treasures.”¹⁷⁵ Regardless of the rationale, Fenton’s account demonstrates that clear communication between the two groups did not take place, preventing a sharing of power.

¹⁷² William N. Fenton, “The New York State Wampum Collection: The Case for the Integrity of Cultural Treasures,” *American Philosophical Society* Vol. 115, No. 6 (Dec. 30, 1971), 437-438.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 458.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 459.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 437.

Fenton coordinated the effort to consolidate four, formerly separate institutions that reported to the State Education Department into one office, the Office of Culture Education. This effort included a new facility in the Empire State Plaza to house the museum, library, and archives. As part of the Office of Culture Education under the State Education Department, the museum falls under the jurisdiction of a complicated state bureaucracy. Adding an additional layer of internal politics, all museum staff, aside from those in management positions, are unionized. Around the time when the museum consolidated into the Office of Culture Education, each additional political level of regulations drifted the museum further away from establishing a degree of shared authority even within the institution itself, let alone with any community outside the museum.

The power struggles within the institution are present in many of the exhibitions involving the Native Nations whose homelands fall in modern day New York State. There was a dramatic difference between Arthur Parker's correspondence and notes regarding the creation of his dioramas, and the dioramas developed by the State Museum between 1988-1992, which are currently still on display in the museum. While Parker was concerned with accuracy, he still recognized the importance of involving the communities in the creation of his displays and interpretations. The scripts from the creation of the new exhibits demonstrate a great emphasis on science but little evidence that Native groups were involved in the development process. The preference for science often disallows social and cultural elements from the exhibits making it more difficult for them to address the concerns of Native groups.

The prominence of the "hard" sciences over ethnology or history was clear throughout the scripts for all elements of the Native Peoples of New York section of the museum. For example, in the scripts for the "Settlement System Model," which describes

the development of a scale-model of a Mohawk village (circa A.D. 1600), the focus was entirely on the archaeological, geographical, and botanical elements rather than the cultural systems that informed the design of the village. The first notes for the development of this unit appear in June 1986. At this early stage, the statement of purpose explains, “This one-eighth inch scale-model of a protohistoric Mohawk Iroquois settlement will show the relationship of a village to its surrounding environment and special activity areas, such as fields, fishing places, stream fords, etc.”¹⁷⁶ The detailed description of the model at this early date emphasizes the landscape and the effect of the environment on human settlement. The script only addresses culture as it related to the management of the natural environment. By July of 1988, the curatorial teams asserts in their notes, “Since this unit was never intended to be a Mohawk village model, but a Mohawk settlement model, consensus was reached that the primary purpose of the model was to illustrate a Mohawk village’s placement within the environment.”¹⁷⁷ The underlining of the word settlement demonstrates that by calling it a settlement instead of a village, it allowed a focus on only scientific influences in the creation of that living space, and directly dismisses cultural influence. This provides a means for staff to argue that collaboration by community members was unnecessary since the purpose of the exhibit was settlement within the environment, not village culture. By April of 1989, there was still little conversation in the script regarding village culture, other than to note the “human activities associated with the June establishment of a new village,” and “Native adaptations to the Upstate landscape which can be compared and contrasted with that of

¹⁷⁶ Preliminary Script, “Unit 819 – Longhouses, Palisades, and Village Life (Settlement System Model),” June 13 1986, Native People of New York Script Book One of Two, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

colonial Euroamericans to be shown in the colonial Albany model, c. A.D. 1750.”¹⁷⁸ The focus through to the completion of this unit, much like the rest of the Native Peoples of New York gallery emphasizes science, allowing a distance from the human elements of the history. Furthermore, according to the script notes, none of the American Indian advisors attended the planning meeting for this display. The project notes indicate that budgetary restrictions prevented the transportation of advisors to the meetings accounting for their absence in many of the script notes. The development of this one unit in the exhibit suggests that the museum staff desired collaboration with the Native Nation it represented, though they did not have the means to provide full access. Forming a Native Advisory Committee allowed the museum to say it worked with consultants, to whom the museum professionals may have presented their work once completed, but they could not fully involve those consultants in the development of the project while it was in progress due to the budget restraints. Holding science in such a prominent position throughout the exhibit provided the museum with a way to develop the exhibit with the information staff could afford to collect. Monetary constraints also provides a reason why staff did not include Native communities more in the process of developing the exhibits.

The scripts list American Indian consultants that “have served as advisors to the concepting (sic) and development of this unit,” and as “liaisons to the Native American community in regard to specific content questions and materials needs.”¹⁷⁹ The script notes

¹⁷⁸ Script, “Unit 819 – Longhouses, Palisades, and Village Life (Mohawk Settlement Model),” April 14, 1989, Native People of New York Script Book One of Two, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

¹⁷⁹ Final script “Forest Foragers,” Native People of New York Script Book One of Two, 1987, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York. p. 17.

claim these individuals as consultants, but the planning meeting records demonstrate that they were rarely present in the development stages. Reading the details, descriptions, and sources it is clear that scripts were devoid of the influence of any oral tradition, cultural explanations, or Native scholars at all, since none are cited in the work. The scripts use scientific descriptions of each diorama, often focusing mainly on what the region would look like, what the people would look like, and what resources they would have access to at that point in history, without any description about the cultural meaning of practices. It is also telling that while Ray Gonyea (Onondaga) served on the staff at the State Museum during this time yet he was not included as a part of the curatorial staff and the script forms list him only as a consultant. Gonyea's absence from the curatorial team not only suggests a lack of collaboration with Native communities, but also reflects the focus of the exhibit on science rather than the social or cultural elements of the groups presented.

The exhibits developed between 1988 and 1992 remain unchanged in the museum today, despite calls from the Iroquois Nations for alterations.¹⁸⁰ The focus on scientific accuracy in the exhibit left the dioramas devoid of a human element. When a guest tours the space, there is an immediate confusion, as the sign designates that it is the "Native Peoples of New York" exhibit, yet the only imagery is a large diorama of a mastodon and its calf, with no humans in sight. The exhibition script explains that this first diorama means to demonstrate that following mastodons brought the first humans to the area of New York, yet the diorama does not show humans following the hunt at all.¹⁸¹ The rest of the exhibit

¹⁸⁰ Sue Ellen Herne Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

¹⁸¹ Final Script "Ice Age Landscape," Native People of New York, Script Book One of Two, 1986, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

displays detailed dioramas representing different periods of human occupation of New York, mainly highlighting the work of archaeologists, geologists, and botanists to create the correct environment. The focus on scientific evidence is most apparent in the last diorama in the exhibit (Three Sisters), the Mohawk Village scale model, and the true-to-scale replica longhouse that were all developed from evidence at archeological sites to represent the lifeways and landscapers of the year 1600.

The exhibit as designed in the 1980s and 1990s comes to an abrupt end around the time of European arrival, closing with the replica longhouse that guests can enter to view yet another diorama. The Longhouse is the first place that includes a cultural element, as guests listen to traditional stories presumably told by the elders who are a part of the diorama in the longhouse. This end to the exhibit left guests to assume that the people no longer existed or that their story ended with European contact. By the time the dioramas were installed in 1992, the museum ran out of funds to extend the exhibit into the modern day. Between 1996 and 2005, the museum worked to amend the issue of the exhibit abruptly ending by adding a display of objects from the Governor's Collection of Contemporary Native Art, which is a part of the museum's Ethnology Collection. Tony Cook (Oneida) was at that time a museum educator who worked to acquire the objects for the collection and served as curator to the exhibit.¹⁸² While this display included contemporary pieces, it remained disconnected from the rest of the exhibit.

As part of a planned redesign of the entire museum space beginning in 2006-2007, the NYSM organized a facelift for the Natural History, History, and Native Peoples of New

¹⁸² Betty J. Duggan, "Introducing Partnered Collaboration into Native American Gallery Project in a State Museum," *Practicing Anthropology*, (Vol. 33, No. 2, Spring 2011, 29

York galleries by hiring an outside exhibit design company to revamp the look of the museum. For the Native People gallery, the plan included updating the exteriors of the existing dioramas to match the new esthetics of the rest of the museum, adding new interpretive labels in front of each diorama to update information to the latest archaeological findings, and refurbishing the longhouse and village display, and replacing the exhibit of objects from the Governors Collection with new ethnological exhibits. When the current Curator of Ethnography and Ethnology, Betty Duggan, arrived at the museum in the summer of 2007, plans for the gallery renewal were in progress, but the galleries were not yet altered. In 2011, Duggan, published an article in the journal, *Practicing Anthropology*, about the challenging process of integrating collaboration with Native communities into the plans for the new design that was already moving forward on a tight schedule and a set concept for the redesign.

In her article, Betty Duggan describes the first meeting she attended at the museum that included the outside exhibition design company and the museum management. She notes that the design team and management discussed deadlines, concerns, problems while describing the plans while a majority of the museum staff, including Duggan, listened to their negotiations. When the floor was finally open to staff questions at the end of the meeting, Duggan inquired about the role the Native communities would play in the development of the new ethnology exhibits, to which the contracted design teams looked “perplexed.”¹⁸³ Duggan said, “I was surprised by the scope of the Museum-wide project and short time allowed for content development, but more so by the absence of a collaborative

¹⁸³ Ibid., 28.

Native voice in the planning of new exhibits in the Native Peoples gallery.”¹⁸⁴ Regardless of the museum management’s initial reaction to Duggan’s inquiry, by November of 2007 she was able to gain permission to create a Native American Advisory Committee (NAAC) to collaborate in the planning of the new exhibit. Even while Duggan began to quickly organize the NAAC, the department required her to submit an outline of themes and sample content to keep in line the production deadlines set by the design team. Due to the time constraints, Duggan needed to develop content from the 1988-1992 ethnology scripts before the NAAC completely formed. A step forward in the museum’s efforts to share authority, the committee revealed even more challenges in bringing together the museum and the Nations.

The conditions from museum management regarding the committee included limited financial support and time since the planning for the exhibit was already underway. Duggan “was cautioned to keep NAAC small.”¹⁸⁵ Finding members to serve on the committee proved another challenge as many that served on the advisory committee in the 1980s and 1990s were concerned that the museum would not actually listen to their input or make changes based on their suggestions. In the past, the museum only asked the advisory committee to comment on a completed script for the exhibit and had no involvement in the planning stages. Many NAAC members were afraid that this would happen again. Initial conversations with potential NAAC members confirmed these hesitations and former Native advisors were reluctant to work with the museum again when Betty Duggan approached them in 2007 for the Gallery Renewal project.¹⁸⁶ Assuring potential committee

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

members that she wanted an open collaboration, by 2008 Duggan managed to persuade one person from each of the seven federally-recognized and the two state recognized nations in New York to meet in Albany for two days in May to discuss the exhibits at the NYSM. One representative that became the NAAC Co-Coordinator with Duggan, presented five thematic sections and five shared principles that the NAAC wanted to see in the new ethnology exhibits. The ideas presented a new conceptualization for the entire design and content of the displays offered by the internal departmental plan.¹⁸⁷ The participants in the meeting also insisted that a formal appointment of NAAC representatives by their respective Nations needed to occur before they would contribute further. From that meeting until autumn 2008, Duggan worked to coordinate a formal appointment of members to NAAC with the museum management, the Nations' leaders, and the preliminary members that attended the initial meeting. Her efforts resulted in a formal invitation from the museum's director to the Nations' to appoint representatives for the development of the new exhibits.

A number of meetings followed the initial gathering of initial NAAC contributors, including two additional multi-day meetings in Albany and several meetings within Haudenosaunee, Shinnecock, and Unkechaug communities led by NAAC members between Duggan and the communities' elders and leaders in 2008-2009. Duggan also met with the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans on their Wisconsin reservation in 2011. Efforts to travel to Native Nations after the 2009 required an external planning grant since all out-of-state travel, the NAAC collaboration funds, and all funds for the Gallery Renewal project were frozen. The meetings were only one part of Duggan's larger three-part collaboration effort envisioned for NAAC that included members partnering with Duggan in artifact and

¹⁸⁷ "Native Peoples Gallery Working File," October 23, 2007, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.

illustration selections including the preparation of labels, and a third objective to have the NAAC collaborate with other museum staff and disciplinary consultants to conclude the content of the ethnology exhibit. The last two parts of what Duggan calls “partnered collaborations,” will remain unrealized until the state lifts its budget freeze.

Members of the Native American Advisory Committee came to the meetings with a deep knowledge and understanding of the museum world. In her initial outreach to potential NAAC members, Betty Duggan contacted curators, educational experts, tribal historic preservation officers, or directors at tribal, public, and national museums that either agreed to serve provincially, or recommended others. Thus, they all were cultural specialists with a vast knowledge of working with the communities they serve. Sue Ellen Herne of the Akwesasne Museum, for example, served on the committee and brought to the meetings her own understanding and experiences working with her community at the museum. The NAAC developed a plan to include five thematic areas of the exhibit, based on five principles that united their members across national and cultural lines. These included; how land shaped our Native culture(s); the completeness of our worldviews, which form our Native values, lifeways, material worlds; how we communicate our Native cultures; Coping with change through time; Stable relationships through time. The exhibit plans call for a further organization into five subsections: “People of the Longhouse,” about the Haudenosaunee people, “People of the Shore,” about the Long Island peoples, “People of the River,” about the Mohican and Algonquian people, and two sections of themes that are common link in all the nations, “Wampum” and “Defining Events.”¹⁸⁸ According to

¹⁸⁸ NAAC and Betty Duggan, “New Exhibits for the Native Peoples of New York Gallery: A General Project Description and Implementation Plan,” Draft Recommendations of 1st NAAC Meeting, May 2008, NYSM Anthropology Department, Ethnology Archives, New York State Museum, Albany, New York, pp. 3-4.

Duggan, and museum management viewing a powerful and stunningly illustrated Powerpoint presentation on the NAAC plan received the proposal well, noting, “They were now engaged in the NAAC exhibit plan, drawn into the interwoven environmental and cultural knowledge, values, history, and stories of each broad group (and exhibit section).”¹⁸⁹ Management even asked the NAAC to present their presentation to the contracted design team as well. A new level of shared authority, which not seen in years at the museum, appeared present once more.

The bureaucracy of the state put a hold on the progress the museum made in terms of collaboration and shared authority with communities. Funding restrictions on travel further than a distance of thirty miles from the museum including a ban on all out-of-state travel, a ban on applying for outside grants, and a freeze on the NYSM’s entire Gallery Renewal project, including the budget for the NAAC members’ travel and Duggan’s travel expenses for further consultations and research placed a quick halt on all the progress made by the NAAC and museum management. The current environment within the State government and the New York State Museum make it nearly impossible for shared authority with the communities the museum serves to occur. This is not limited only to collaborations with Native groups, but all community outreach. While many staff members within the museum are eager to work with communities and affectively share authority over exhibits

¹⁸⁹ Duggan, “Introducing Partnered Collaboration,” (2011), 33.

and programming, the restrictions and regulations of the state political system make those goals nearly impossible to reach.¹⁹⁰

Other museum outreach programs suffering from budgetary constraints and political maneuvering by state officials are the Museum Club and Discovery Squad, two model afterschool programs that provides a safe space in the museum for children and teens in Albany's underserved neighborhoods. Nationally recognized as the premier program of its type, the Museum Club began with an idea to provide an organized agenda for Albany's children who already sought out the museum as a safe place after schools closed. This was the first program within the New York State Museum to reach out actively to its immediate community and to minority groups. The programs for both children and teens maintain an impressive record of accomplishment, with 100 percent of participants graduating high school in a district with a 52 percent graduation rate.¹⁹¹ Aside from helping students improve their grades and get on track for graduation, the program also provides a space for students to participate in the museum. They begin to feel a sense of involvement, concern, and ownership over the museum and its exhibitions. It is a living space to them where they feel comfortable to learn and question; everything an institution focused on sharing authority

¹⁹⁰ The information was gathered during two field visits to the NYSM by the author, August 26-27, 2012 and September 17-18, 2012. During these visits I informally discussed these issues while conducting my research in museum's collection with approximately ten staff members, including curatorial, collections and cultural resource management, exhibition, and educational personnel. Formal interviews were not conducted with museum personnel.

¹⁹¹ See New York State Museum *Youth Services: Museum Club & Discovery Squad at the NYSM* informational pamphlet, 2012, NYSM/State Education Department, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.; Also see Education: After School Program on the New York State Museum website, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/education/student/afterschool.html> (Accessed October 2, 2012).

should strive to become. Unfortunately, budget restraints that limit the program's hours and size prove challenging in keeping the program a successful part of the museum.

The institutional history of the New York State Museum focused on promoting science above all other disciplines, the micromanagement of the museum by other state agencies and staff that have no training or understanding of the professional museum world, and the lack of available funds to foster collaboration projects prevents shared authority from being fully recognized. The efforts of a few staff members, such as Betty Duggan, demonstrate that the possibility of collaboration is possible even at the state level, but highlights that unless the culture of the institution changes to reflect that goal shared authority within the institution and in its work with the public will remain unrealized. Changing the culture needs to occur from both the top and the bottom in this case, as staff can only make so many strides if they continually run into bureaucratic walls. Perhaps those in positions of power over the activities of the museum need awakening to the possibilities shared authority can provide, in much the same way that the museum management appeared impressed with the draft exhibit guide plan of the NAAC. Fear of the unknown and of relinquishing control is holding the museum back from fully understanding the publics they serve and the best way to communicate with them. Though some efforts to share authority exist within the State Museum, it will remain disconnected from its many communities unless the museum changes its approach.

The Private Sector Sharing Authority: The Iroquois Indian Museum

The collaboration between an Iroquois couple, Tam and Stan Hill, and a pair of anthropologists, Christina Johannsen and John Ferguson, gave birth to the idea to establish the Iroquois Indian Museum. In the late 1970s, Johannsen and Ferguson worked to complete a publication on Iroquois art that brought them to the homes of hundreds of Iroquois artists

and craftspeople across the Six Nations. It was in the Hill's kitchen that Tam Hill suggested to Johannsen that she should start a museum after learning so much about Iroquois art. That moment ignited the idea for a museum designed specifically to present art from the Six Nations. The idea of a museum took years to recognize. After the removal of Parker's Iroquois Life Groups dioramas in the New York State Museum, Johannsen, and Ferguson felt that the area would welcome a museum focused on Iroquois culture, history, and art. The Schoharie Valley, traditionally Mohawk land, appeared as the perfect location for such a museum, particularly due to availability of space on the second floor of the Badgley Building in the Old Stone Fort complex. A board of founding trustees included mainly non-Natives, but Brenda Laforme of the Onondaga Nation joined the board, and many of the other members had well established connections to the Six Nations. Unassociated with any particular Native Nation, the museum established as a private institution educating the public of Iroquois history and art with some advisement of members of the Six Nations.¹⁹²

The idea for the Iroquois Indian Museum stemmed from a friendship between Non-Native scholars and members of the Six Nations, so it seems appropriate that as plans for the museum developed, collaboration with the Iroquois became a major component of its design. The museum's establishment and continued development was a complex web of collaboration between non-Native institutions and funding programs, institutions run by the Six Nations, and members of the Six Nations serving as staff, board members, and consultants. The collection to start the museum came from John Ferguson and Christina Johannsen primarily, with other donations coming from trustees. Loans from the New York State Museum and the Rochester Museum and Science Center, as well as archaeological

¹⁹² Dr. John P. Ferguson, "Museum History," 1996, Iroquois Indian Museum Files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

material from the Schoharie County Historical Society help to create the first exhibits. The museum opened on May 10, 1981 due to the great generosity of the Schoharie County Historical Society, which provided the location of the museum for ten years rent and utilities free, while also donating money to the creation of the first exhibit.¹⁹³ The help of the Iroquois Community, the academic community, and the local community to create the museum articulates its collaboration efforts from the start. These three communities converged to develop the museum set the tone for the culture of the institution to this day. Like the National Museum of the American Indian, the Iroquois Indian Museum is a non-Native institution actively attempting partnerships with Native communities to varying degrees of success at sharing authority with those communities.

The mission of the museum reflects its effort to educate the non-Native public about the Six Nation's history, culture, and art. The mission states: "The Iroquois Indian Museum exists to educate the public about the Iroquois by collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting their arts. As an anthropology museum, it emphasizes the contemporary and also is informed by history and archeology."¹⁹⁴ The museum is not located on a reservation or associated with any one of the Six Nations, so they are the only museum that actively works with the entire Iroquois Nation. It rests close to a popular tourist location, Howes Caverns, and benefits from tourist traveling in the area. The primary audience is larger than a single Native community, but they still find some ways to make sure Native voices are included in the museum's interpretation. One method to keep the Iroquois community involved in the process of the museum is through the contemporary art that brings artists and their patrons

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁹⁴ Iroquois Indian Museum Mission Statement in the Iroquois Indian Museum Collection Policy, 2012, Iroquois Indian Museum Files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York

into the museum in order to donate or view the exhibitions. From the forming of the institution, the museum has included both Native and non-Native on its board of trustees for this purpose.

The museum has always maintained an effort to include Native voices in some way. The official history of the museum held in their collection maintains that "the beginnings of the Museum were modest in terms of assets and space but were very great in terms of a conviction that the Iroquois people needed a place of dignity in which to meet those who all too often only knew Indians through John Wayne, pow-wows, negative "news," or self-serving history books and legends."¹⁹⁵ In the case of the Iroquois Indian Museum, their mission strives not to make sure that the museum shares authority with the communities it serves, but that those communities (Native and non-Native audiences) share with each other. To accomplish this, the museum became a repository for both archaeological material and contemporary art to link the past and present to encourage guests to let go of stereotypes. The contemporary art in particular creates a bridge for non-Native visitors to understand Native cultures as they exist in the present. Throughout the years, Native staff served in the museum space as educators or guides to provide opportunities for dialogue between the Six Nation's community and all other visitors.

The main focus of the museum has always been contemporary art, likely due to the interests of the first director, Christina Johannsen. The fact that the museum retains a commitment to collecting and preserving contemporary Iroquois art, requires that they maintain relationships with Iroquois artists. In addition to encouraging dialogue between their diverse audiences, the museum is also striving to nurture relationships with the

¹⁹⁵ Dr. John P. Ferguson, "Museum History," 1996, Iroquois Indian Museum Files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

communities it presents. As the museum grew, it continued to maintain those ties with the Iroquois community by including members of the Six Nations on the staff, on the board, and in the planning of the new location of the museum.

When the growing museum required a new location, architects that were both Iroquois and non-Native worked together to create the design of a longhouse. The large building made a striking addition to the landscape on the drive up to Howe Caverns. The museum received planning grants from the New York State Council on the Arts to bring on consultants from the New York State Museum, Don Oakes for fundraising, and Robert Mathais to focus on the development of the children's museum. The NYS Council on the arts also supported architect Charles Treat Arnold to develop a schematic design of the new building, and grants contributed to the create an exhibition script with the assistance of consultants from the academic and Iroquois communities. "In a moving ceremony, Richard Chrisjohn, an Oneida Iroquois, burned tobacco in the Nature Park of the new site and asked for the Creator's blessing upon the Museum and its efforts to bring people together from different cultures."¹⁹⁶ Architect Arnold designed with the active influence of three Iroquois trustees, particularly artist Neville Spring who joined the board for the purpose of remaining involved in the building process. The resulting building made an eye-catching statement on the landscape as a modern longhouse, drawing attention from visitors traveling to Howe's Cavern while embodying a cultural symbol of Iroquois pride.

Early on in the development of the new museum site, archaeology of the Schoharie valley took on an important role in the museum alongside its roots as an Iroquois art museum. Following the flow of the permanent exhibit, guests first encounter Iroquois

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.

history through the items uncovered on archaeological digs associated with the museum. The museum not only presents archaeology in its interpretation, but also maintains its own archaeological research dimension built from one of its founders, avocational archaeologist Jim Osterhout. Maintaining that the most important aspects of archaeology are accuracy and sharing, Osterhout set the stage for the collection of archaeological items in the museum.¹⁹⁷ The archaeology exhibit even includes information about the programs that unearth the collections, and the degree of public and Native involvement in the process.¹⁹⁸ The museum does not accept any human remains in the collection. Most of the archaeological endeavors it was involved with were limited to the excavation of village and work sites to avoid disturbing burial grounds.¹⁹⁹ In addition to including Native consultants or archaeologists in the projects, the Archaeology Department also reaches out to the local community, including students from neighboring schools in the work through the museum's archaeological field school. In one instance, a summer program brought together students from SUNY Cobleskill and museum members on a dig of the Haviland Site.²⁰⁰ Other endeavors of the Anthropology department in the museum strove to attract local residents to get involved, including tables at the annual summer festival where museum staff examined and identified community member's artifacts.²⁰¹ In the same way that the arts program of the museum

¹⁹⁷ "Archaeology," Museum files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

¹⁹⁸ Field visit by the author, November 15, 2011, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

¹⁹⁹ Iroquois Indian Museum Collection Policy, 2012, Iroquois Indian Museum working files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

²⁰⁰ "Summer of Archaeology," *Museum Notes: Iroquois Indian Museum*. Vol. XIV No. 2 (November 1994), 3.

²⁰¹ "Iroquois Weekend has Art, Heart, ad Artifacts," *Altamont Enterprise* (July 1, 1999), 14.

strives to bring Iroquois artists into the museum to share their art, there was an attempt to include members of the Six Nations and the local community in its archeological endeavors.

The anthropological exhibit of the museum strives to present the importance of the archaeological cultural material to the present culture and arts of the Iroquois. The museum space itself provides a means to compare the past with the present, as the exhibits lead the guest from the historic material to the contemporary art which often depicts the same cultural symbols seen in the archaeology exhibit. Additionally, a video of an artist working stone to make an arrowhead within the exhibit brings the art to life, demonstrating the skill required in its construction and providing a context of traditional practice to the elaborate carved stone pieces in the contemporary exhibit. Research in archaeology, ethnohistory, and material culture continue to maintain importance in the museum and is successful in collaborating with at least a small portion of the museum's community, though this is limited to a few trained Iroquois and local students. Nonetheless, the museum does serve as an important repository to the local community, maintaining archival material of land records and a large archive of historic documents from the Schoharie Valley from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The museum actively maintains relationships with Iroquois artists to continue to expand their museum and gift shop collections, but they also bring Iroquois members into the museum in other ways as well. In 1988, the museum brought on its first intern, Linley Logan, from the Seneca community of Tonawanda.²⁰² Advertisements for interns at the museum often specified that they were looking for a member of the Six Nations. In *Akwesasne Notes* in 1988, the museum advertised an "opportunity for an Iroquois to gain

²⁰² Dr. John P. Ferguson, "Museum History," 1996 Iroquois Indian Museum Files, Iroquois Indian Museum, Howes Cave, New York.

knowledge and skills for later employment in the museum world or at cultural centers."²⁰³

This advertisement demonstrates not only that the museum strove to include members of the Six Nations in the museum's development, but also that the museum knew its community enough to put it in a Native news source. An artist, Logan was the museum's first Iroquois employee and assisted with exhibition design. Most notably, Logan created a large scale model of the new museum building prior to its completion to get the community excited about the new mark on the landscape. Though not all the interns to follow Logan have also been Iroquois, the internship program still provides one method of including Six Nation's members in the museum process.

In addition the numerous Iroquois board members the museum maintained throughout its short history, it also employed a number of members of the Six Nations to the staff, most often in the role of educator a position in direct communication with the public. First, to hold the position was Onondaga storyteller, Perry Ground, filling the newly created position upon the completion of the current building in 1992. Only a year afterward, Akwesasne Mohawk storyteller, David Fadden took over the position, followed by Mohawk Mike Tarbell in 1994. Tarbell maintained the longest tenure in the museum, still active in the institution currently, but the strain of the distance to the museum from Iroquois homelands is evident in Fadden who did not stay longer in the position due to the draw of his home in the Akwesasne. The educator is often the face of the museum to the public, giving tours, leading education programming, and addressing school groups of all ages during their visits. As it is part of the museum's mission to educate the public about Iroquois contemporary life to combat stereotypes, the placement of an Iroquois in the role that directly works with the

²⁰³ "Internship at the Iroquois Indian Museum Schoharie, New York," *Akwesasne Notes* Rooseveltown (January 31, 1988), 23.

public partially serves this purpose. With a goal primarily focused on educating non-Iroquois about Iroquois history, the museum serves as an exporter of culture to non-Natives. In the interest of sharing authority, the museum does a better job of reaching non-Iroquois in this way than it does actually interacting and working with the Iroquois communities themselves.

The museum offers a space for Iroquois artists to display their art and interact with the non-Native community in an educational setting. Artist participation in the museum takes various forms, such as giving demonstrations, talks, and attending the annual summer festival. In some cases, the museum asked artists to participate in the creation of exhibits. In 1994, the museum invited artists to donate their opinions regarding the impact of casinos on Iroquois art. According to the *Museum Notes* the "concept of this new presentation will offer the exhibition of art of social commentary as a background and subject for discussion between leading anthropologists who study the Iroquois and Iroquois artists who have a viewpoint on the divisive issue of high-stakes gambling."²⁰⁴ In this case, the staff at the museum designed the exhibit but organized a discussion session in the museum between anthropologists and Iroquois artist for the public to attend. This is one example of the type of shared authority many mainstream museums attempt to bring into their museums. It allows the museum staff to maintain control over the exhibit, which most guests will see, temporary though it is, and lets the voices of the various communities it serves to enter fleetingly. Exhibits such as this do not create a sense of ownership in the museum by the participants since their interaction is minimal, and does not entice them to return after the discussion has ended. It also does not give anything back to the community of Iroquois artists, since the discussion lends itself to presenting information to the non-Iroquois public

²⁰⁴ "Iroquois Arts in the Time of Casinos" *Museum Notes: Iroquois Indian Museum* Vol. XIV No. 2 (November 1994), 1.

than to truly creating a forum for Iroquois communities to work through these issues. Attempts such as this of sharing authority follow the lines of what Michael Frisch advocates, but it presents itself as a superficial power-sharing, presenting authority sharing on the surface, but allowing the staff to retain control of the interpretation that makes it to the exhibition.

The National Museum of the American Indian, the New York State Museum, and the Iroquois Indian Museums create partnerships and collaboration efforts with their communities to varying degrees of success dependent on the culture that shapes each institution. The missions of each museum indicate the focus of the institution that drives the institutional culture. The New York State Museum retains a clear focus on science as its primary objective, while both the NMAI and Iroquois Indian Museum directly address working with living communities as a part of their mission. However, even the New York State Museum's mission indicates recognition of the participation of its audiences, stating, "It encourages these [diverse] audiences to take delight in learning by participating in the discovery process central to its work."²⁰⁵ As museums influenced directly by government systems, NMAI and The New York State Museum are shape by the hierarchal systems that can hinder the sharing or authority with a public. New York State Museum has the most restrictive environment that does not lend itself to fostering meaningful relationships with its populace mainly because they lack understanding of whom the museum is serving. The Iroquois Indian Museum and the NMAI have direct relationships with the Native populations they represent, though power sharing within these environments is frequently superficial and do not create an atmosphere where communities feel ownership over the

²⁰⁵ The New York State Museum's current mission statement is available on their website: <http://www.oce.nysed.gov/ctl/museum/museum.htm> (Accessed November 10, 2012).

interpretation, collections, or physical space. Each of these institutions at one point or another reached out to communities to consult on exhibitions or worked with groups to develop collections. To some within the institutions that constitutes a sharing of authority, yet the power to disregard community opinions falls to the museum professionals. Each has their own issues that limit collaboration. The National Museum of the American Indian struggles with negotiating between their Native and non-Native audiences' expectations. At the New York State Museum, politics prevent meaningful dialog to occur with communities. Its physical location away from the Iroquois Nations it represents creates difficulty for the Iroquois Indian Museum. A deterrent to a higher degree of collaboration at all three institutions is a misguided sense of place and a struggle to identify its community. Museums often speak of their audience but do not always consider how those in their immediate area can become a part of their museum community to develop from "visitors" to "users" of the institution. This is where understanding how the place that the museum occupies and the cultural symbols attached to that place can help serve the museum as tools to create interaction and discussion with the public. Every museum has a community linked to the place it occupies and museum professionals must take the time to identify it and take some time to understand it to encourage a meaningful interaction between the two.

This type of relationship with audiences is possible and can be beneficial to institutions who gain life-long users of the institution. If the public feel they are truly a part of an institution, or that the institution represents who they feel they are or how they fit into their community, they are more likely to become members and return to the museum on a regular basis. These are the types of relationships the Akwesasne Museum created with its community by developing an institutional culture that fosters shared authority and creating a space for community members to connect to cultural symbols that provide methods for an

individual to connect to the exhibits while it simultaneously encourages community-building. This is achievable at the larger institutions described here if they reexamine their purpose within their communities and reach out to them through interactive programming that connects the individual to important cultural symbols which reinforce a sense of place and community.

CHAPTER 4

INDIGENIZING SHARED AUTHORITY CREATING A NEW MEANING OF MUSEUM

The tribe has been working since the early 1980s to get the belt back from the New York State Museum. It was returned to the tribe before there was a safe place to store it. The belt had been kept in a vault at a branch of the Bank of Montreal on Cornwall Island until the special room was completed. About 100 people lined up to pass the wampum belt from hand to hand a quarter of a mile from the banks of the Raquette River to the Akwesasne Museum on Route 37. The belt had traveled via an old, 12-person canoe from Cornwall Island.²⁰⁶

The Wolf Belt's return to Akwesasne involved every community member that wished to participate. A press release by the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe described the events planned for the return of the belt to the museum and encouraged anyone interested in participating to contact the museum.²⁰⁷ The events of the day included the transportation of the belt from Cornwall Island to the museum, a traditional lunch, a performance by the Akwesasne Women Singers, and a closing by elder, Ernest Benedict. The belt went to the Canadian side of the reserve first, traveled by canoe across the St. Lawrence to the American side, and passed through numerous hands before it found its final resting place within the museum. The key participants in the events included past and present professional staff at the Akwesasne Museum and the Ronathanhonni Cultural Center on Cornwall Island, as well as Arnold Printup, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's Historic Preservation Officer. It also included community members old and young, and stressed the importance of the belt belonging to

²⁰⁶ Lori Shull, "Wampum belt returned to reservation museum," *Watertown Daily Times* (September 18, 2010).

²⁰⁷ St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, "Wolf Belt Returning to Akwesasne" press release (September 14, 2010).

the entire community.²⁰⁸ The belt's journey from the New York State Museum to the Akwesasne Museum displayed the importance of sharing it with the entire community and not leaving it professionals to handle its passage alone. It also demonstrates the trust and respect that the museum professionals have for the community they serve and their willingness to ensure they understood that the Belt was not merely for the museum alone.²⁰⁹

A long traditional system of power sharing within the Haudenosaunee culture informs the Akwesasne Museum's emphasis on community ownership and sharing of authority. Balance is central to their creation myth, and the spiritual, social, and political structures developed throughout their history provide a model for the museum's practices. In order to understand the institutional culture present at the museum, one must first examine Haudenosaunee cosmology, the history of the League of Nations, and the Covenant Chain. The ideas and guidelines present in each inform contemporary life at Akwesasne and in the greater Iroquoian landscape, containing procedures for negotiating power and place. This chapter examines the concepts of power and authority as described within Iroquoian societal structures in order to demonstrate how those cultural ideas influenced the creation of the cultural center and museum. An exploration of the development of the museum, its programs and exhibitions over the years, and the opinions of community members that actively engage with the museum, further explains how the museum views its role in the community. Ultimately, it demonstrates that traditional Mohawk beliefs, a strong sense of place, and traditional arts containing cultural symbols inform the institutional culture at the Akwesasne Museum. The focus on these aspects of culture increases the degree of

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Wolf Belt exhibition at the Akwesasne Museum, field visit by Meaghan Heisinger April 10, 2012, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

collaboration between the museum and community members in exhibits and programs, setting it apart from the mainstream institutions described in the previously.

The Akwesasne Museum is a cultural symbol by anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition, embodying generations of traditional practices in a single space. Geertz argues that, "a people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects."²¹⁰ Cultural symbols hold the meaning of a culture's ethos, and together create the system that holds the worldview together. Examining the cultural symbols that hold meaning for the community is crucial to understanding how the Mohawks at Akwesasne relate to a sense of authority and place. Akwesasne baskets are cultural symbols that reveal the Mohawk's strong connection to the environment that informs the relationship to place at Akwesasne. One should not understate the importance of baskets to Akwesasne culture, as it is a practice that merges together other crucial cultural elements. The Museum is inextricably linked to baskets and basketmaking. The museum provides a space to teach the art and ensures the preservation of the craft for future generations. Baskets and the museum bring together the community and connect them to the environment and meaning of place at Akwesasne. The traditions of balancing human needs with the environment are present in Iroquois cosmology and exemplify early thoughts on sharing authority.

Iroquois Cosmology

The creation story or other oral traditions that maintain cultural value reflect many of the other significant cultural symbols to Haudenosaunee communities. These elements physically manifest in decorations and other outward representations, such as the depiction

²¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 127.

of the turtle in Haudenosaunee traditions, and maintain spiritual and emotional significance in the meaning they hold as ideas about the world. Often, the purpose of American Indian origin stories is to establish a sense of place in the world as well as provide a connection between humans and the environment.²¹¹ Haudenosaunee cosmology, therefore Mohawk cosmology, reveals how the environment informs the people's culture and creates a meaning to place. The connection to place resonates at the Akwesasne Museum and provides a foundation for connecting and collaborating with community members to occur.

In his many years studying the Haudenosaunee, anthropologist William Fenton traced the three periods and prophets that shaped the Iroquoian worldview and religion. Fenton explains that the first period was that of the creation story, or the time of the Sapling, that shaped the earth and informed the basis of cultural identity for the Haudenosaunee. Following this was the time of Deganawi:dah, the Peacemaker, who initiated the Iroquois Confederacy through the foundation of the League of the Longhouse and the Iroquois League, which informs the people's sense of social and political position in world. Finally, the time of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet in the late nineteenth and twentieth century marks a period of cultural compromise that is palpable still today.²¹² Each period contributed cultural symbols and reveals further the relationship the people have with the land and power relations.

Tracing each of these periods reveals important information regarding the Mohawk view of their connection with the land. This tie is manifested in the creation story. According

²¹¹ Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie, eds., *Native American Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 22.

²¹² William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3.

the Mohawk tradition, the earth rests on the back of a turtle swimming in the primal sea. Sky Woman, who was the daughter of the Sky Chief or Great Spirit, once resided far above the earth in the Sky World. The people know Sky Woman by many names, including Mother Earth, Old Woman, or the Wicked Grandmother. The story can vary depending on the teller; however, in all accounts, the Sky Chief uproots a tree in the Sky World and cast out Sky Woman, throwing her down to earth. The animals on the earth attempt to create a place where Sky Woman might land, and ultimately it was the muskrat that was able to bring up some dirt from the bottom of the ocean and place it on the turtle's back. In former Mohawk Chief, Tom Porter's version of the story, Sky Woman places the mud onto the back of the turtle and begins to dance and chant in the language of the Sky World. As Sky Woman continues to dance, the turtle begins to grow. Porter explains, "So this turtle got bigger and bigger until it became what they call Turtle Island. That's why the Lakota, the Blackfoot, the Mohawks, most all of the original people, when they refer to the earth, call it *Turtle Island*."²¹³ According to the story, the combination of human and natural efforts ultimately resulted in the development of the earth.

The story continues with Sky Woman giving birth to a daughter. The daughter becomes pregnant when she meets a cloud in the form of a man in what Porter describes as a "spiritual conception." From this pregnancy, the daughter gives birth to twins, Sapling, or *Tebaronhiawá:kon*, and Flint, or *Shawiskara*. Sapling entered the world through a natural birth, and his brother emerged through his mother's side, killing her in the process, an act he would later blame on his brother in order to win his grandmother's favor. Sapling and Flint created the rest of the elements of the earth, rivers, plants, trees, in competition with one

²¹³ Tom Porter (Sakokweniónkwás), *And Grandma Said...:Iroquois Teachings as Passed Down through the Oral Tradition*, trans. and ed. Lesley Forrester (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp, 2008), 53.

another. Constantly jealous of his brother, Flint would relentlessly attempt to destroy anything Sapling created. For example, when Sapling created berry bushes, Flint places thorns on them to make it the fruit difficult to harvest. The bothers also created the first humans from the dirt and clay, forming them into dolls and breathing life into them. Holistically, this story explains that there is a balance between elements of the earth and that no man is ever fully good or fully evil. This is crucial to Iroquoian thought that is present in the later creation of the League of Nations and the Covenant Chain. Since no one person is fully good or fully evil, it is important to maintain balance through communication and negotiation. Equally important is the concept that the earth created humans, thus establishing an undeniable bond to the land as demonstrated in the creation story. From this first period, the time of the Sapling, many themes emerge, including the idea that the earth is living and continually expanding, as well as a sense of renewal marked in the changing of seasons.²¹⁴ Fenton also points out that another major theme in the narrative is to accept and not oppose the forces of nature and to recognize the importance of reciprocity. Informing societal organization and acceptable behavior, the creation narrative is the basis for all Haudenosaunee life. Important cultural symbols emerge, such as the turtle and the tree of life, which demonstrate the relationship between the people and the natural environment.

Troy Johnson, professor of American Indian Studies at California State University, Long Beach, argues, “The cosmology of ‘sense of place’ is crucial to being an Indigenous person. The understanding of one’s place in the overall cosmology of being is what connects

²¹⁴ William N. Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 49.

one with the universe and creation.”²¹⁵ Johnson noted that the names Native Nations take for themselves as well as their place names reflect their cosmology of place.²¹⁶ Mohawk, or Ratinien’kehá:ka in English means *the people who live where the flint stones are*, or *The People of the Flint*.²¹⁷ While some Native Nations name themselves from the place of creation, the Haudenosaunee name their groups for the places in which they settled. The Oneidas are the *People of the Stone*, the Onondagas *People of the Mountain*, Cayugas, *People of the Landing* and the Seneca are the *Great Hill People*. The landscape of the place informs the naming of groups, which in turn creates a strong sense of identity based of that place. As the Sapling created the elements of the earth, including humans, the people are bond to the land and the land informs a sense of identity.

In addition to cultural symbols that create a cultural ethos, the Mohawk’s socio-political history, particularly pertaining to the protection of community land reveals the importance of the particular place at Akwesasne. The Iroquois historically tied the concept of protecting place to their negotiations of power and peace. The identifiers of each group linked to the location in which they live demonstrates a tie to the land but further reveals that the Nations saw themselves as different from one another based on their location. The groups did not always see themselves as a unified league, and many violent conflicts occurred between them before the establishment of the confederacy. Referred to as the Mourning Wars, this period of intersocietal violence occurred due to a belief of spiritual

²¹⁵ Troy Johnson, “American Indians, Manifest Destiny, and Indian Activism,” *A Cosmology of Sense of Place*, *Place and Native American Indian History and Culture*, Joy Porter ed., (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 71.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

²¹⁷ Tom Porter (Sakokweniónkwaw), *And Grandma Said* (2008), 158.

power in all things. When a loved one was lost, their death reduced the collective power of the group and successor needed to take the individual's name and societal duties to ensure a restoration of power. For those who were high status within the society, successors usually came from inside their own lineage, however, those of a lower status in the community would look to adoption of outside members to take the role of loved ones. This belief system led to a vicious cycle of revenge warfare in order to bring captives into a grieving community so that they may regain power lost. Adoption of the captive, or their execution, accomplished a power restoration.²¹⁸ According to Tom Porter, “Almost all the people had strayed from the Creator’s ways. This period of time was perhaps the darkest, most violent, and hopeless, of our entire history. This was a time when blood stained Mother Earth.”²¹⁹ In a time of turbulent wars in the Northeast, the Mohawks, along with other Nations entered into the next era of Iroquois cosmology as described by Fenton. The emergence of Deganawi:dah and his Good News of Peace and Power that offered condolences prayers to ease grieving hearts without warfare encouraged the League of Nations to emerge. His teachings created a spiritual and social structure that negotiated power to link the Nations in peace.

The period of Deganawi:dah, the Peacemaker brought together in peace the five original groups of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in the League of the Longhouse. According the legend of the Peacemaker, the supernatural being first approached Hiawatha who struggled with his own grief after the deaths of his daughters. Deganawi:dah came to Hiawatha with Wampum and Words of Condolence that made him see reason rather than

²¹⁸ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 32-38.

²¹⁹ Tom Porter (Sakokweniónkwaw), *And Grandma Said* (2008), 274.

allowing mourning to drive him mad.²²⁰ According to many accounts, Hiawatha gained support slowly as he moved from nation to nation, finding the Onondaga chief the most difficult to convince since his madness due to grief proved severe. The continual rubbing of wampum and Words of Condolences eventually brought him around, and the initial league containing five nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) came together to develop rules for diplomacy to end the perpetual wars. The design of the League included a number of what might be called "checks and balances" to ensure that power did not consolidate into one group or individual. Power to the League was a spiritual force created through alliances among the people of the League and within each nation of the League.²²¹ The diplomatic system set up by the League of Nations was the first socio-political example of shared authority among the nations. The design of much of the system encouraged discussion, listening, and negotiation rather than assertions of authority by single parties.

Anthropologist Dean Snow explains that Deganawi:dah's code based his code on three main components. These are "the good word (righteousness), power (civil authority), and peace (health of society)."²²² Members of this League refer to themselves collectively as the Haudenosaunee, meaning *People of the Longhouse*. The name refers the type of structure the nations made for housing and the geographic range of the league that resembled a longhouse. The League spans geographically across Iroquoia (contemporary New York State, Quebec and Ontario) from the Saint Lawrence River to Lake Huron. Each group was responsible for maintaining particular cultural, social, and, later, political elements. The

²²⁰ Richter, *The Ordeal of the Long House* (1992), 32.

²²¹ Ibid., 30.

²²² Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 60.

Mohawks are the Keepers of the Eastern Door of the Longhouse within the League and are Older Brothers within its structure. The creation of the League of Nations increased the significance of certain established cultural symbols, such as marine shell beads, which would become wampum and the tokens of activity in the League.²²³ This change-point in the history of the Mohawks continues to reflect certain cultural symbols and self-identifiers that link the people with their place of settlement and the need for cooperation across the nations. As part of a larger social network, the Mohawks maintained cultural links to the other groups through the League. A position in the League provided an additional identity linked to place, that of the keepers of the Eastern door, a title that holds symbolic, socio-political, and geographical meaning.

The third major piece of Haudenosaunee cosmology was a period of revival marked by the teaching and influence of a Seneca man named Handsome Lake (Skanyadariyoh). In the year 1799, Handsome Lake survived a near death experience because of prolonged abuse of alcohol. While he was in a coma, Handsome Lake had the first of a series of visions in which he spoke with the Creator. These visions drove his teachings to the Iroquois people and established a moral code known as *Gai'wiiio*, or The Good Message.²²⁴ The code was a combination of a reawakening to traditional Haudenosaunee ceremonies and beliefs, as well as an outline of a new moral code that addressed new problems since the arrival of Europeans. Handsome Lake preached against alcohol abuse, witchcraft, gambling and sexual promiscuity. Handsome Lake's teaching influenced many across Iroquoia, including the

²²³ Ibid., 66.

²²⁴ Ibid., 159.

Mohawks, and represented a negotiation or adaptation of traditional practices to a new and changing world. Handsome Lake's new religion combined both old and new ideas

Handsome Lake's teachings came at a major change-point in the lifestyles on the Iroquois. In the period prior to the American Revolution, the Iroquois achieved great economic and political success. Divisions among the Five Nations during the war left some Iroquois in defeat. The invasion of homelands reduced the amount of land held by the Nations, which significantly decreased the political strength of the Confederacy. Most significantly, the reduction of political power led to many changes in the economic and social world of the Iroquois following the way. The loss of land made hunting and trading, two of the main economic pursuits that created political power, extremely difficult. The Iroquois out of necessity expanded their agricultural pursuits, shifting men's role in society to the plow instead of hunting grounds. The time of Handsome Lake's teachings directly influenced the people's connection to land and place and informed the individual's relationship to the community.²²⁵ The code's unique combination of traditional practices and new moral guidelines assisted traditional Haudenosaunee belief in adapting to the truths of reservation life.²²⁶

Handsome Lake's teachings speak directly to a concept of shared authority as he emphasized the importance of the community above the individual. Many of his teachings appear inspired by Christianity, but also reflect the recent shift to an agricultural lifestyle. Anthropologist Elisabeth Tooker noted that Handsome Lake's condemnation of individualistic behavior, such as drinking, reflected the fact that agricultural cycles require all

²²⁵ Elisabeth Tooker, "On the New Religion of Handsome Lake," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (October, 1968), pp. 187-200.

²²⁶ Snow, *The Iroquois*, 162.

community members to contribute to certain cycles. This does not mean that concerns about the community did not exist prior to this period, but does emphasize that community over the individual became more important in the nineteenth century with the economic and social changes that came with an agricultural life.²²⁷ Handsome Lake's teachings emphasized the inclusion of all community members. The Thanksgiving ceremonials and its associated dances that traditionally promoted individual accomplishments (such as warriors) transformed into dances that included everyone. Furthermore, in his dismissal of the rituals of the medicine societies, he dismissed a structure that gave power to members of the societies and excluded non-members. These ideas speak to a sense of power sharing and shared authority within the community which inevitable influence the creation and institutional culture of the Akwesasne Museum.

Haudenosaunee cosmology offers one way to examine how people came to understand place, community, and the balancing of power. Each stage of teachings developed and reinforced ideas about sharing authority distinct in Iroquois political relationships with nations outside the confederacy. The Covenant Chain, a series of treaties between the Iroquois, European Nations and other Native Nations, expands the principles of power sharing beyond internally agreements in the League. The formation of the League of Nations did not possess political characteristics, offering mostly a moral and social structure for the Nations cooperating to bring peace. No central government existed for the Five Nations that could deal with foreign policy in a collective, singular manner. The function of the Grand Council of the League of Nations began to change with increased European contact, participation in new trade networks, and the spread of disease. By the

²²⁷ Tooker, "On the New Religion of Handsome Lake," 197.

mid-seventeenth century, some members of the Grand Council meetings began to include discussions of a more political nature, diverging from the traditional Words of Condolences. Even still, the League did not create the ability of the Grand Council to make political decisions for all five nations. The Iroquois Confederacy developed out of a need for the Five Nations to develop united policies for interactions with the French. The Confederacy modeled itself after the League, but it was a separate entity designed to serve a diplomatic purpose in forming alliances with other nations.²²⁸

Development of the Akwesasne Museum

Iroquois cosmology emphasizes that there is power in all things and that alliances are important to ensuring the use of power for good purposes in the world. The structure of the Confederacy and the way the Iroquois approached treaty agreements with Europeans reflected the importance of power sharing. To make an alliance requires participation of equal parties. The Iroquois often used the term "brother" in alliances to demonstrate their equality. In some case alliances distinguished "followers" and "leaders." Distinct leaders and followers in the design of many alliances did not diminish power sharing. The followers are contributing as much to the leader as the leader is to the followers. To listen and serve the needs of followers proved the most important function of a leader. Often this places the leader in a position as a negotiator between differing points of view from followers.

Following this tradition, the Akwesasne Museum serves as a leader in the community, acting as a negotiator and an advocate for its followers. In Iroquois thought, alliances are living and ongoing relationships that need to be continuously nurtured and improved in order to

²²⁸ Daniel K. Richter, "Ordeals of the Longhouse: The Five Nations in Early American History," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800*. 2nd ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds., (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) pp. 11-27.

ensure their health and longevity.²²⁹ The museum maintains its alliance with the community through shared authority that invites community members (followers) as active participants in the development of the museum. The purpose and position of the museum within the community imitate the influence of Iroquois thoughts on diplomacy and power. These values informed the creation of the Akwesasne Cultural Center Library and Museum and influenced the institutional culture and allow the museum to share authority with the community.

The Akwesasne Museum arose from a history of compromise, negotiation, and sharing of power. It also grew through a connection to sister institution, the Akwesasne Library, which all folds under the umbrella of the Akwesasne Cultural Center. A grassroots effort between 1968 and 1971 created the Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center. The goal was to create a library situated within Akwesasne to increase literacy and instill a sense of pride in residents. The desire of Akwesasne to protect important items to the community's history and culture created the museum within the cultural center by 1972. Created earlier than most other tribally own and operated museums, the institution grew from the donations of the community members. The efforts to create such an institution within Akwesasne required the dedication of its citizens, as well as the cooperation with governmental and educational entities both within and outside the Nation. The creation of a casino or the stipulations of repatriation through NAGPRA that requires certain conditions for returned artifacts often initiate the development of tribal museums. The Akwesasne Museum is unique in that it developed from the efforts of the nation's members as a purely

²²⁹ Mary Druke Becker, "Linking Arms: The Structure of Iroquois Intertribal Diplomacy," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800*. 2nd ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell, eds., (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) pp. 29-39.

educational space. The Library and Museum developed as a space for the preservation and exploration of traditional ideas and practices.

The cultural center stemmed from concerns about the lack of literacy and education among Mohawks, but perhaps more importantly it makes a point about sovereignty and the ability of the Mohawks to serve their own needs better than American and Canadian entities. As an early account of the Library points out, "It was built by Mohawk Indians and is staffed and operated exclusively by them."²³⁰ Once the community determined to build a library, fundraising projects began within Akwesasne through benefit lacrosse games, raffles, rummage sales, and charity meals. The core group initiating the project also created alliances with St. Lawrence University and the New York State Department of Education.²³¹ With the support of all parties, ground broke for the Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center on October 25, 1970. Community member, Minerva White was instrumental in the creation of the Library. She initially applied for a number of grants that would fund the construction, purchasing of books, and assisting in staff salaries. Through St. Lawrence University, the William H. Donner Foundation gave \$5,000 for books, as did the New York State Division for Library Development. Additionally, The Office of Economic Opportunity of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties paid for construction labor, The Office of Economic Opportunity paid the salaries of Minerva White and three librarians until June 1972, and the New York Council on the Arts granted \$5,000 for use of cultural activities on site, such as traditional arts classes. To ensure that all community members could access the Library, the

²³⁰ Rose J. Carpenter, "The Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center: A Case Study," August 4, 1972, Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

²³¹ "Our History," Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

Canadian Mohawk Band Council bought and renovated a bus to serve as a busmobile bringing books to the Canadian side of the reserve.²³² The effort to build the library included participation from members of the community, along with collaboration of people and organizations outside Akwesasne. On September 25, 1971, the library held their dedication and opened to the public. The community saw a need for a services they wished to provide for their own people and worked to make it happen, collecting the power to do so from crucial internal and external alliances.

The Museum as part of the cultural center emerged organically out of the institution that presumed to offer books, tutoring, and lecture events for the people of Akwesasne. Once the library opened, the staff did not anticipate that community members would start donating important objects to Mohawk and Akwesasne history and culture. A beaded map of New York State started the museum. Following that donation, others donated baskets, lacrosse sticks, clothing, artwork, and more beadwork. The need for a museum proved immediate, so by 1972 the Akwesasne Cultural Center expanded to include a museum in the basement of the library building.²³³ Early photographs of the museum show a birch bark canoe and numerous baskets piled into a tiny space.²³⁴ The donations came quickly enough to have the museum space crowded with materials and resembling the cabinet of curiosities of old within a few years. From its beginning, the museum accepted both historic and

²³² Rose J. Carpenter, August 4, 1972, "The Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center: A Case Study," Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

²³³ Sue Ellen Herne, Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

²³⁴ Photos in the Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center History file, circa 1970s, in Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

contemporary objects, providing visitors with a view of the past and the present at Akwesasne. Some arts in the early collection demonstrate continuity in the community for centuries, such as basketmaking, allowing viewers to see the changes in styling over the years. Others, such as paintings from local artists, display newer artistic styles practiced by community members. An early history explains, "Paintings done by local Native painters are most interesting because they depict life as it used to be and life as it is now among the Mohawks."²³⁵ Creating a museum space provided a means to care for and display all the donations the cultural center received. Developing a museum was not the focus of the cultural center staff, but it became clear that the community wanted one.

The current program coordinator at the Museum, Sue Ellen Herne, explains that the library and museum never separated, likely due to both serving as institutions of learning.²³⁶ Most written histories about the Akwesasne Cultural Center focus on the library and only mentioning the museum in passing. In fact, no one has ever attempted to write a history solely on the history of the Museum. Even though the staff did not plan to have a museum, they did recognize its importance to the community. Once the need for the museum made itself apparent, the board of directors appointed a director and staff to run the museum. By all accounts, administration viewed the museum as its own entity under the umbrella of the cultural center and left to run its own programs and create its own exhibitions. Yet, the library held, and continues to hold, a greater focus by the trustees and Board of directors, regardless of the achievements of the museum. This could be because the community

²³⁵ Untitled history, 1980, Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

²³⁶ Sue Ellen Herne, interview with Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

essentially created the museum, and the library staff never intended to have to focus on a museum. Fortunately, the staff that do work in the museum feel passionately about it, and throughout the history of the museum fought the Board to be taken seriously, gaining the respect of many in the community and the surrounding areas. Salli Benedict served as the museum director in the early 1980s and helped create growth in the museum by developing relationships with community members. In a letter to the Board of Directors in 1985, John Kahionhes Fadden of the Six Nations Indian Museum in Onchiota, New York, wrote that "Due to the enthusiastic activities which resulted from Ms. Benedict's energetic ideas...many objects from the artists of the community have been donated or are on loan. This reality reflects a contagious reaction to the character of the director." Indicating some kind of issue with the board that may be driving Ms. Benedict to resign from her position, Fadden adds, "If Ms. Benedict's energetic presence is removed, some of the loaned articles may be removed also."²³⁷ This was one example of the museum staff recognizing the need to collaborate with other institutions and the community. Regardless of the Board's focus, the museum managed to grow and succeed through the dedication of its staff to the community it serves. The museum, built by the community, continues to thrive from its ability to make the community feel ownership of the space and connect to it. The museum staff truly are leaders in the traditional sense that listen to and advocate for the community they serve as negotiators between the community and the direction of the Board.

The efforts of the museum staff to share authority with the community create very different exhibitions that one might see at the New York State Museum. Here the emphasis

²³⁷ John Kahionhes Fadden and The Six Nations Museum to Akwesasne Museum Board of Directors, August 13, 1985, Akwesasne Library File Folders, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center, Hogansburg, New York.

is tradition, but tradition depicted to be living and existing in the contemporary world. Displays demonstrate traditional art, but also emphasize the importance of living artists, living communities, and the relevance of the past to the present. The Akwesasne Mohawk community maintained authority over the preservation and representation of their culture through the museum by offering a space of self-determination that interprets Akwesasne history through a Mohawk lens. While the museum remains small in physical space (still located in the basement with its entrance at the rear of the building), the museum still maintains an important function within Akwesasne by creating links between people within the community and areas surrounding the reservation. The Akwesasne Museum also transcends its physical space, becoming a place for the enrichment of culture, educational learning, and the further development of connections both within and outside of the Akwesasne community. David Carr argues in his book *A Place Not a Place* that visitors not only experience a museum while they are within its physical boundaries, rather, a museum creates opportunities for self-reflection to learn life lessons that shapes our identities. This is the function of the Akwesasne Museum and the staff makes the effort to further its extensive outreach programs to expand its space outside its physical boundaries.

According to the project narrative, “Gathering Knowledge” constituted an effort to involve the younger generation in the exhibit development process, as well as educate about Mohawk culture. The main goals of the exhibit are to build public access, expand educational services, reach families and children, and to use technology more effectively. Considering that the first object seeks to reach out to the public demonstrates the museum’s want and need for relevancy to the contemporary world. The narrative states:

The Akwesasne Museum programming initiative, “Gathering Knowledge” is designed to aid people from within and without the Akwesasne community in taking a closer look at Mohawk culture. One of our goals is to build public access to the museum on the local front and beyond by employing activities that require public

participation in both planning and implementation. The opportunities created by this project will help to increase our audience, with lasting effects on our institution's capacity.²³⁸

The narrative directly states that the design of the program encourages shared authority by including “activities that require public participation in both planning and implementation.”²³⁹ By creating a program to produce an exhibit, the museum insures that community members are involved in every aspect of the exhibits interpretation, including the research, planning, and final layout of the exhibition. The museum does not say they want to create an exhibit that speaks to the community, they say the goal of the exhibit was to encourage active participation in the museum process by non-professionals. The idea to include children in the process came from a radio program on drug prevention programs in which a survey revealed that students wanted adults to follow through with projects. Herne says that having the children work with adults not only gives them a sense of inclusion, but also teaches them the difficulty of putting projects together. In this way, students could understand why projects sometimes are not completed.

As junior curators to the exhibit, the museum staff involved children in the entire exhibition process. Herne explains that the youth came up with the bulk of the ideas as they worked together with museum professionals. Children also had the opportunity to interview elder community members regarding traditional arts, providing a means for the younger generation to understand the importance of traditions such as basketmaking. The project offered ways for the children to participate in art, and the display included some of the

²³⁸ Akwesasne Museum, *Gathering Knowledge Project Narrative*, 2005, Akwesasne Museum files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

²³⁹ Ibid.

children's own artwork produced from the program.²⁴⁰ Programs such as this create a space where the younger generation can interact and learn from their elders, building strong community ties. It also emphasized the importance of the living community members in the telling of what it means to be from Akwesasne. Once the proofs of the displays were completed, museum staff showed them to the children and then changed it according to their reactions. The junior curators felt a real sense of ownership over the content and message of the exhibit. In one instance, when the children were not satisfied with a photograph included, they brought in a picture from a family collection to replace it. The museum is more than simply a place with static displays, it is a living cultural institution that makes alterations to its approach and outreach according to the community's needs. It is a place of inclusion and serves a function of participation rather than mere presentation.

The design of the exhibit itself promoted participation, even from those who were not a part of its development process. Much of the exhibit was interactive and provided a hands-on experience for visitors. Herne explains that while a few of the items are under Plexiglas, there are a number of rattles and baskets that guest can touch and even play with.²⁴¹ Combining with new technology, one part of the exhibit houses a traditional style drum under a glass case. Six buttons line the front of the box, each with traditionally influenced Mohawk music by artists of Akwesasne. The musical genres range from traditionally influenced, to country, blues, and even rap, demonstrating how tradition has

²⁴⁰ North Country Public Radio, "We are from Akwesasne," Sue Ellen Herne interviewed by North Country Public Radio, Audio File, <http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/archive.php?id=7215> (Accessed, November 5, 2008).

²⁴¹ Ibid.

been adapted into styles that are more contemporary.²⁴² When the exhibit is inside the museum (as it is now) the recordings of bands from Akwesasne is another way to make the community an integral part of the museum. When it travels, an exhibit like this serves a number of functions for non-Natives. The combination of tradition with contemporary music styles emphasizes the living community, challenging perceptions of indigenous communities as static. It also educates those outside the community about the importance of tradition to the present, even as it is “modernized.” The interactive portion of it makes the display attractive to both children and adults, further extending the educational possibility of the exhibition.

The *Gathering Knowledge* narrative was clear that a crucial element to the project was its ability to reach larger numbers of people than it could if it simply remained in the museum. According to Sue Ellen Herne, the exhibit traveled to Seaway Trail Discovery Center at Sackets Harbor NY; Parcs Canada at Mallorytown Ontario Canada which are non-Native venues; and the Salmon River Central School in Bombay NY, whose staff and administration is predominately non-Native though the student population is predominately Native.²⁴³ The project also traveled to the St. Regis Mohawk School so that the school did not have to pay to commute students to the museum. That event included a tent display along with guest speakers and an impromptu Smoke Dance demonstration started by the students of the school.²⁴⁴ In addition to the students from the St. Regis Mohawk School,

²⁴² Sue Ellen Herne, email to Meaghan Heisinger, December 3, 2008.

²⁴³ Sue Ellen Herne, Email to Meaghan Heisinger, October 10, 2008 and Sue Ellen Herne, Email to Meaghan Heisinger, January 13, 2009.

²⁴⁴ Akwesasne Museum, *Gathering Knowledge Project Narrative*, 2005, Akwesasne Museum files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York., p. 18.

approximately fifty-five Akwesasne Mohawk community members and sixty students also attended the event from the Salmon River Central School.²⁴⁵ By bringing the museum out into schools and other venues, the museum truly expanded its audience, and allowed for students and adults to learn and participate in Mohawk cultural activities where they could not otherwise.

The Akwesasne museum staff serves as representatives of the Akwesasne community while working with other institutions. Sue Ellen Herne served as a co-curator with Katsitsionni Fox (Bear Clan from Akwesasne) on an exhibit for Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence University. The exhibit was entitled *Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: An Exhibition of Hotinonshonni Contemporary Art*, and showcased contemporary art as an extension of traditional Haudenosaunee values.²⁴⁶ The exhibit asked artists to demonstrate what following in the footsteps of ancestors meant to them. One artist, Rick Hill created portraits of historic figures and used an art-deco colors (acrylic on canvas) giving them a modern feel. Herne says, “I think that is part of his whole message here...that these people’s lives still resound today.” She continues, “[the bright contemporary style] adds layers to what he is trying to say and brings it to the present...[it demonstrates that] we are still walking we are still making the footsteps.”²⁴⁷ Powerfully placed in the setting of a non-Native university, the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ North Country Public Radio, “Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: An Exhibition of Hotinonshonni Contemporary Art,” <http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/haudenosaunee/haudenosaunee.php#> (Accessed October 3, 2008) The website includes an online tour of the museum with photographs and an audio interview with Sue Ellen Herne and Katsitsionni Fox.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

exhibition held the opportunity to have an impact on the perceptions of those not familiar with the community. Herne says,

They think about us in the historic past, and people come to the museum and they are looking for a certain time period...No culture is static. People have kind of frozen us into a certain time period. And I think it has to do really with America not coming to terms with the history of Native people here, and in a lot of ways not wanting to know it...we are trying [through the exhibit] to nudge people to actually take a look at it and see and understand who we are and where we are coming from.²⁴⁸

The living tradition of the Akwesasne community unmistakable in the exhibit and speaks to non-Natives at the university in order to change mainstream perceptions of Native people. Herne comments that this is a major aspect of the exhibit, thus making the location of the display crucial to its meaning.

The Akwesasne museum staff makes a continuous effort to represent Akwesasne interests outside of their immediate museum setting. Often the museum serves as consultants to exhibits of indigenous communities. Formerly a member of the St. Lawrence International Partnership, the museum has developed relationships with non-Native institutions and have aided in the interpretation and inclusion of Native voices and themes within their museums, two of which displayed the *Gathering Knowledge* traveling exhibit. SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University are both closely located to the Akwesasne museums and collaborate with Akwesasne members on exhibits, such as the *Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors* exhibit.²⁴⁹ Sue Ellen Herne also served as a consultant to the New

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Akwesasne Museum, *Gathering Knowledge Project Narrative*, 2005, Akwesasne Museum files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, 4.

York State Museum in Albany in their plans to redo the “Native Peoples of New York” exhibit.²⁵⁰

Exhibits such as the recent *North by Northeast* traveling exhibit, which the Akwesasne Museum assisted in its development, traveled to another Native-run institution, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Connecticut in 2009. The exhibit also traveled to the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor in Bar Harbor, Maine at same year, ensuring that it reached audiences outside of a Native operated venue.²⁵¹ Though they have not worked extensively with the Iroquois Museum in Howe Caverns, New York, they have shared resources and photographs for exhibits and have continued to expand their working relationship. The Iroquois Museum is not Native operated, though a number of board members are Native.²⁵² The museum maintains an informal relationship with Kanatsiohareke, an off-reservation Mohawk community on traditional lands in Fonda, New York.²⁵³ The Kanatsiohareke maintain programs that serve much the same function as the Akwesasne museum in preserving the continuation of traditional culture. Not a museum but a community, Kanatsiohareke emphasizes a traditional lifestyle within the community.²⁵⁴ In all these efforts, whether to Native or non-Native audiences, the Akwesasne transcend the physical boundaries of the museum in order to extend the influence of the institution.

²⁵⁰ Sue Ellen Herne interview by Meaghan Heisinger, Phone, November 21, 2008.

²⁵¹ Kathleen Mundell, *North by Northeast: Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk, and Tuscarora Traditional Arts* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2008), vii.

²⁵² Sue Ellen Herne email to Meaghan Heisinger, October 27, 2008.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ See Tom Porter, *Kanatsiohareke: Traditional Mohawks Return to the Ancestral Homeland* (New York: The Kanatsiohareke Community, 2006).

While the Akwesasne museum is concerned with educating those outside the community about their history, traditions, and contemporary society, the museum's primary function is serving its own community. David Carr argues that, "Cultural institutions are also common places used daily and freely by diverse public learners seeking accurate information, expansive intellectual experiences, or usable guidance for the conduct of life."²⁵⁵ This is precisely the function of the Akwesasne Museum. While providing a means for diverse audiences outside the community to learn about Haudenosaunee culture, it provides its own community with the "guidance" to learn traditional practices to incorporate into everyday life. The Akwesasne Museum offers a space where the community can connect with each other, share traditional arts and practices, and preserve important aspects of the culture for future generations. Herne explains that for the staff at Akwesasne one of the most rewarding aspects of the job is reconnecting community members to the traditional arts and being able to promote the continuation of arts within the community.²⁵⁶

Potentially the most important aspect of traditional Akwesasne Mohawk culture is basketmaking. Used for ceremonies, everyday uses in homes, and as a form of income, black ash splint and sweetgrass baskets are a marker of the community. "The knowledge of basketmaking has been passed down in families for generations," say Herne and Lynne Williamson (Mohawk heritage). "In the 1970s the Akwesasne Museum began holding classes to ensure that the tradition would continue," they explain, "filling the gap created in modern times when parents need to take jobs outside of the home rather than living off the land and

²⁵⁵ David Carr, *A Place Not a Place* (2006), 11.

²⁵⁶ Sue Ellen Herne interview by Meaghan Heisinger, phone, November 21, 2008.

pursuing basketry as part of family based livelihoods.”²⁵⁷ In a changing world, the museum offers a place where the contemporary and the past can meet and emphasizes the importance of tradition in the present.

Herne and Williamson explain, “Skilled basketmakers have been teaching Mohawk community members in an informal classroom setting at the museum, as well as in recreation halls and other cultural venues.”²⁵⁸ Many of the basketmaking instructors are fluent in the Mohawk language, and the speaking of the language is an integral part of teaching the basket making process. “We feel the love of our ancestors, our nations, our clans, and our families when we hear the language and its use in our oral traditions,” say Herne and Williamson. They continue, “Even though not all the students are fluent in the language, they contend, “it is also empowering for people with limited language knowledge to hear the language while learning basketry skills.”²⁵⁹ As a location that brings together multiple generations of Akwesasne, the museum not only encourages the continuation of traditional arts, but also allows youth to hear, learn and speak the Mohawk language [Init] order to ensure its preservation.

Salli Benedict (Mohawk) described the importance of basketry to the people of Akwesasne: “Basket making brings Akwesasne people together to gather natural products that are used to make the baskets. When we gather to make baskets, we speak our language,

²⁵⁷ Sue Ellen Herne and Lynne Williamson, “Haudenosaunee Traditional Arts: A Glimpse into Our House” in *North by Northeast: Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk, and Tuscarora Traditional Arts* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2008), 7.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

share our culture, tell stories of the past, and share ideas for the future.”²⁶⁰ She further noted the importance of the Akwesasne Museum in offering a space for this tradition to continue. Recognizing that many modern homes at Akwesasne do not lend themselves to basket making, community members credit the continuation of the craft to places such as the museum, which assisted the community in providing access to ample space and instructors for more than thirty years. Florence Benedict, a Mohawk resident of Akwesasne for fifty-nine years has made baskets her entire life. A respected elder, she took time to teach a number of classes at the Akwesasne Museum, sometimes with the help of her sister. Benedict enjoyed sharing the traditional skills with younger generations.²⁶¹ The museum not only allows for the continuation of the traditional art, but also provides a means for the younger generation to interact and learn from their elders. While learning the art of making baskets, students gain exposure to the Mohawk language, traditional stories and oral history, as well as ensuring strong communities bonds with each other and the environment.

As a tribal museum, the Akwesasne museum incorporates aspects of traditional Euro-American museum practices and also promotes changes that better fit the needs and purposes of the Akwesasne people. The museum functions to serve its own community while also reaching non-Natives outside the community. It is a place of negotiations between cultures. Far from the static exhibits of the New York State Museum, the Akwesasne museum often takes on the role of an advocate for change within the museum world regarding representations of Native people. This occurs both within and outside of the

²⁶⁰ Salli Benedict, “Akwesasne Basket Making: An Enduring Tradition,” in *North by Northeast: Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk, and Tuscarora Traditional Arts* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2008), 11.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

museum itself, allowing the museum to transcend its physical boundaries. The museum also serves as a space for community learning and personal growth, affecting its visitors beyond the time they spend in the institution. The Akwesasne museum truly shapes the way the individual interacts and relates to their world by offering guests and community members experiences they will not soon forget. Whether they are opening the eyes of outsiders who are unaware of the vivid living culture of the community, or reconnecting community members with their traditions, the museum offers a potentially life-altering experience. This makes the museum much more than simply a place, it is a life force that affects and changes the world around it.

The museum's ability to reach the community and neighboring communities successfully depends on the institutional culture influenced by Iroquois cosmology, diplomacy, and beliefs about power. The museum staff as leaders in the community, developed methods to get the community involved in exhibition planning and traditional arts programs that allows community members to shape the museum and their experience in it. The Akwesasne Museum is able to achieve this higher degree of shared authority due to its recognition of an identifiable community linked to the place. This community is diverse and very political, like any other. To dismiss the ability of other museums with larger communities to maintain the ability to develop this degree of shared authority discredits the achievements of the Akwesasne Museum in creating methods to work with its diverse populace. The collaboration efforts demonstrated at the museum are achievable at any institution if they take the time to understand the sense of place the museum occupies, particularly the history and culture of the community that occupies the place, and then translates that into programs involving tangible cultural symbols that connect a diverse community together by way of a common past, present, and future. The ability of the

professionals to relinquish some of their power to the thoughts and concerns of the community reflects the role the institution views itself playing in the community, as negotiator rather than an authority on the past.

Cultural symbols, such as basketmaking, provide tangible ways to connect the community with each other, Akwesasne culture and history, the museum itself, and a sense of place. Basketmaking creates a reciprocal relationship between the museum and its users, by providing the community a space in which to learn and participate in basketmaking, and the creations of the basketmakers then serve to build up the museum's collections or its gift shop. Furthermore, by recognizing their position as a negotiator, rather than the authority on Akwesasne history and culture, the museum is able to learn from its members. Community members contribute ideas and items for exhibits as well as teachers for classes. Perhaps this sense of ownership in the museum comes from the community creating the institution initially, building from that the mindset and dedication of the museum staff to sharing authority maintains a successful practice of power sharing in the institution.

CHAPTER 5

MEANING OF PLACE AND THE MUSEUM INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

INFLUENCING SHARED AUTHORITY

The meaning of the Wolf Belt varies depending on whom you ask. Some claim it is symbolic of the protection of Akwesasne, with the wolves or dogs standing guard on either side. Others insist that it is a border-crossing treaty as part of the covenant chain. Both interpretations relate to the importance of land and sense of place to the culture at Akwesasne. The belt returned to the place of its creation and serves as reminder of the Mohawk's sovereign right to the land as well as their responsibility to preserve and protect it.²⁶²

Integral in all the interpretations of the Wolf Belt is the importance of place. It reveals the gifts that place can offer the people that reside within them if they are willing to accept and protect them. The belt's return home and the care taken to house and protect it in the museum indicate the powerful influence cultural symbols have in connecting the community. The belt holds the history of the circumstances that led to its creation while the community adapts its meaning to the needs and ideas of modern life at Akwesasne. It holds the past and present simultaneously, as it inspires the community to consider issues of sovereignty, preservation of place, and the connection of Akwesasronon to each other, the Six Nations, and non-Native neighbors. The belt articulates that the people of Akwesasne do not merely assign meaning to the place, rather as belt made in Akwesasne suggests, the place gives the people meaning. Created from this place are many cultural symbols, including the Akwesasne Museum that serves as a vessel, holding the cultural meanings of the place and ensuring its protection for the people. Like the belt, the museum does not seek to alter or

²⁶² Darren Bonaparte, "The Wolf Belt: 'As Long as Water Runs, Skies Do Shine, And Night Brings Rest' The Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship Returns to Akwesasne," *The Wampum Chronicles* (2007), accessed, Dec 2012, <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/wolfbelt.html>

ascribe new meaning to the place. Instead, it provides a space for the protection of the gifts the place has to offer.

The Akwesasne Museum is a space within the community that provides a connection to a sense of place, history, and culture by bringing together members of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne to interact and learn from one another. A sense of place and a firm emphasis on cultural symbols provide methods for sharing authority with museum communities. Museums that lack an understanding of their environment and cultural symbols of their community are unable to collaborate with their audience. Basketmaking is the foremost cultural symbol that connects the community to the land, the museum to its communities, and the people to each other. Oral histories used here explore the importance of basketmaking at Akwesasne in order to demonstrate that the emphasis of cultural symbols in museums connects community members to a sense of place and allows for the museum to easily make a connection to the public that is meaningful and inclusive of all.

According to some members of the community, the museum provides a space to learn about the history of the area, particularly if they did not learn the information from their families.²⁶³ At the same time, community members contribute most of the content in the collections and exhibits. The collaboration of the museum and the community allow each to grow, learn, and preserve traditional arts for all generations. It is no surprise that baskets and basketmaking play an important role in the museum and its ability to reach the community. Anthropologists have argued over the history of Mohawk basketmaking, some believing that the Akwesasne learned the craft after contact with Europeans: however,

²⁶³ Sally Martin interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

baskets and splints dating earlier than contact suggest otherwise.²⁶⁴ It is more likely that the Mohawks were already making baskets for centuries for their own use and altered the craft to fit an opportunity for economic profit.²⁶⁵ Dean Snow suggests that the advent of reservations was the period in which the Akwesasne started making decorative baskets for sale.²⁶⁶ While some may argue that this practice developed merely for economic gain, the meaning assigned to baskets to contemporary Mohawks suggests otherwise. As a cultural symbol holding the community in connection with the land, basketmaking since the formation of reservations also served as means to reconnect to that sense of place and identity. The Akwesasne Museum presents basketmaking as the longest unbroken connection the Mohawks have with the land and with their particular place in the world, a position of high importance to the culture not based simply of the economic benefits the art provides.²⁶⁷

Sue Ellen Herne and Lynne Williamson, both Mohawk, explain basketmaking as an essential element of Akwesasne culture that is “deeply rooted in our [Akwesasne] experience of place,” as it encourages connections across the community and connects the community with their ancestors.²⁶⁸ While it is possible that basketmaking took on these meanings since the time of Handsome Lake and reservation life, basketmaking is an element that assisted in

²⁶⁴ Kathryn Bardwell *Interlaced histories of Indian Woodsplint plaited basketry and anthropology*. Thesis M.A. (State University of New York at Albany, Department of Anthropology, 1984), 3.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁶ Dean R. Snow, *The Iroquois*, 157.

²⁶⁷ Akwesasne Museum, *Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center Mission Statement*, Akwesasne Cultural Center Three Year Plan, Akwesasne Museum digital files, 2008.

²⁶⁸ Kathleen Mundell, *North by Northeast Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk and Tuscarora Traditional Arts* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2008), 1.

the revival of culture and reminded the people of their connection to the land and community. Herne and Williamson articulate, “more than a utilitarian craft, basketmaking is a cultural process, a way of learning about the cycles of nature and the right way to live in balance with the land by gathering materials carefully. Basket making connects us deeply to the ecology of Akwesasne.”²⁶⁹ The meaning baskets hold within the community as a tool to connect the environment and community suggests that the art maintains the ability to unite the past with the present, the people with the land, and community members with each other. As a member of the Cultural Center Board, Deb Cook Jacobs describes, “The goal of the museum is to preserve what was or how it was, and going forward with how it is and how it's going to be. All the past, present, and future all in one because that is how we are here.”²⁷⁰ The art of basketmaking and museum both hold the ability to bring the past, present and future together as strong cultural symbols that protect and feed the growth of culture. The cultural meaning of the basket reflects in the meaning of the museum and the two are intrinsically linked to one another and the ability of both to merge place, community, and culture is central to their ability to encourage sharing.

The sweet vanilla scent of sweetgrass tickles the nose upon entering the Akwesasne Museum, a welcoming aroma for visitors. The baskets made of this unique and versatile grass line the entire museum. Each one constructed carefully, its creator meticulously wove the black ash and sweetgrass around molds that give the vessel its shape. The combination of the ash and sweetgrass provide the baskets strength and beauty, allowing it to hold the strong cultural meaning it has come to represent. The basket is made from the natural

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.

²⁷⁰ Deb Cook Jacobs interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 13, 2012.

environment, by the people of the territory, and symbolizes a long and enduring connection between the land and its community. Holding the same cultural purpose the museum is a basket in its own right. Its reciprocal relationship between the place it resides and the community it serves ensures that this is a space created from the environment, and built by the people that call Akwesasne home. This institution does not attempt to ascribe a meaning of Akwesasne culture to its community and tell them who they are; rather it provides a space for the community to express itself. Like a basket, the museum holds cultural meaning while remaining innovative and adaptive to the changing world.

Theories of Place

Discussing Akwesasne is essentially writing a local history, focused on one location and one community. Joseph A. Amato in *Rethinking Home* argues that historians need to rethink the way they write local histories, which cannot be purely for nostalgic reasons, but also must account for change within the place. Amato argued, “Space and time, which once isolated and assured continuity to experience and intensity to face-to-face interaction, have been penetrated, segmented, and diminished by surrounding forces and words.”²⁷¹ This influence and change to small rural communities, of which Amato was mostly speaking, suggests that local historians must account for how these influences have transformed the local community as an important part of the story of a locale. Local community museums often fall into the trap of displaying the preferred past, before dramatic change to the landscape or cultural life. Amato argues that these representations need to change.

The Akwesasne Museum as a local museum and a representation of the community demonstrates that Akwesasne is an institution willing to discuss the changes Amato

²⁷¹ Joseph A. Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

advocates. While presenting aspects of the past, possibly as “nostalgia,” the museum focuses on demonstrating how the community reworks or modifies past to fit into the changing modern world. Perhaps it is the cultural focus of the institution rather than its dedication to history that allows the museum to acknowledge that culture adapts as the outside world presents new influences, or it may be a demonstration of a deeper Akwesasne worldview of adapting change into existing culture. As a representative of the Akwesasne territory as a whole, the museum demonstrates to the community and outsiders that they should not fear innovation but discuss it with heritage. The Akwesasne museum is a space to discuss a sense of place across its many meanings to create a meaningful connection between the people and a sense of community and identity linked to the regional environment.

Museums in general create a new domain, creating an interesting paradox when one place interprets and represents another. In order to locate the meaning of place for the Akwesasne museum one must explore the discussions of “place” among scholars alongside community member oral interviews to put the Museum in context. It is crucial to trace the political and cultural history of Akwesasne relationships to the natural environment that informs their sense of place, as well as how the museum represents and develops this sense of place and Mohawk identity within its exhibitions and physical space. Weaving these together demonstrates how the environment informs the representations of the museum, rather than the museum shaping the meaning of the region with the interpretations it provides.

Many scholars, particularly environmental and public historians, are concerned with the need to maintain a sense of place, and therefore a sense of identity, for communities large and small. Following a mainstream American idea about place, these scholars demonstrate how it is their responsibility to recreate and shape the meaning of a location for

a community. Authority figures construct narratives that either returns an area to a particular moment in time, or to represent the continually changing nature of the community and therefore the location. The concept contends that humans define the land based on their own cultural constructions, regardless of the methods to create the narratives. The various views of place are important in understanding how the Akwesasne Museum relates to its environment, even though the ethos of the place or the objectives of the museum do not necessarily reflect these views on place. Examining other notions about place alongside a Mohawk conception of place presents how the environment built the Akwesasne Museum, instead of the museum attempting to construct an identity for the region.

The meaning of place for community is a main point of focus for many scholars addressing issues of memory and collective identity. Public Historian Robert Archibald argues that place is primarily important to the individual who remembers and imagines it on his or her own terms. The 'home place' for an individual becomes a part of who they are as well as a point of comparison for all other areas the individual encounters in their life. One of Archibald's main concerns is that this connection to home is disturbed through rapid change to a locale, which can result in a disconnection between the memories the site holds and the link of those memories to a sense of community and identity.²⁷² Arguments for the construction of place teeter on a discussion of continuity and change. Michael Hough, a Landscape Architect agrees that cultural and natural forces create the identity of the region. Furthermore, he notes that both of these are in a constant state of change, articulating, "The

²⁷² See Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999).

sense of place is organic, changing with time.”²⁷³ With the emergence of technology, Hough argues that urban networks, which all closely resemble one another, contributed to a loss of regional character and identity. In order to re-establish the identity and uniqueness of locations in the contemporary landscape, we must examine the natural and cultural processes at play. He notes that to return a sense of place to a community, planners need to have a sense of what the landscape reveals, what the history of the area contributes to a sense of identity and the relationship between the community and nature. Each of these elements together informs the place and once reinvestigated can invigorate a sense of place within the community once more.

Many scholars advocate a blending of the old with the new in constructing contemporary places for communities. To this point, Archibald argues, “The places that people make can never be static, but change must not overwhelm continuity.”²⁷⁴ His major concern focuses on rapidly changing communities that made connections to the community’s past and the importance of a region to that past more difficult to locate. Since Archibald views that past is an essential part of the creation of identity to the contemporary community. Creating that connection is crucial. He ultimately claims that it is the public historians’ responsibility to listen to communities and assist them in reconnecting the past to the environment in order to ensure a continued sense of community.

Embedded in Archibald’s argument is the idea that the people *make* the place and that it would not hold the same importance for the community if those meanings go unassigned upon the region. Developing this sense of place can provide the community with

²⁷³ Michael Hough, *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 58.

²⁷⁴ Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember*, 17.

a greater sense of history and identity. Community identity develops further from a sense of how their place relates to others around it. Public historian David Glassberg defines a “sense of history” as reflecting "the intersection of the intimate and the historical-the way that past events of a personal and public nature are intertwined, so that public histories often forcefully, and surprisingly, hit home."²⁷⁵ Museum spaces that encourage community input exemplify how intertwined the personal and public become. Narratives that describe or determine the value of a location for a community help to shape how the people of that community view themselves and their actions in the present. Whether symbolic or factual, these narratives and remembrances, particularly those connected to place inform the direction of the present community. Place then becomes more than a connection to a geographic location; rather it is a connection between the past and the present, ancestors and contemporary community members, and memories and the interpretations of place crucial to community and individual identity.²⁷⁶

For both Glassberg and Archibald there is a direct correlation between place and community, as one does not exist without the other. Archibald describes this as a “mutual obligation.”²⁷⁷ With an eye for the future, the community works to sustain the sense of community and its environment for generations still to come, providing a sense of the connection between the past, present and future. The ability of place to transcend linear time and unite the past, present and future in the same space appears to represent a Native

²⁷⁵ David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 6.

²⁷⁶ Archibald, *A Place to Remember* (1999), 32.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

worldview of circular time, or the Sacred Hoop.²⁷⁸ Archibald and Glassberg recognize the important of place in connecting time, space, and identity, but they both still advocate the need for professionals to create the place for the community. In contrast to this, anthropologist Keith Basso articulates that senses of place are ultimately complex, containing ideas about the self, community, stories and geographic location which are all intertwined and equally present in the importance of a place on individual and group levels. In his examination of Western Apache place-names, Basso's works presents a view of the natural environment from an Indigenous ethos that Archibald and Glassberg neglect.²⁷⁹

According to Basso, place is an important area of study for a researcher truly wanting to understand the values, worldviews and internal identity of a community, since the natural surrounding and identity have a reciprocal relationship. Basso's study reveals that linguistics plays a central role in understanding the importance of place to a Native worldview, particularly for the Western Apache, since the names often reveal the importance of the region to the community. Furthermore, Basso argues, "If place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of *doing* history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine."²⁸⁰ Basso discusses how the environment contains stories of the past that can "stalk" the people and influence their understanding of themselves and their relationship to place. This implies that place exists and hold meaning even if the community

²⁷⁸ Troy Johnson, "American Indians, Manifest Destiny, and Indian Activism: A Cosmology of Sense of Place," *Place and Native American Indian History and Culture*, Joy Porter ed., (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 72.

²⁷⁹ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

does not always recognize it, and that its meaning will be realized through the “stalking.” This is a different concept of the role of place in the construction of community identity and presents an alternative worldview of human and environmental interaction.

Akwesasne is a section of the traditional homeland of the Mohawks, and the meaning of the place is distinct to the landscape. The construction of place and identity follows the concepts outlined by Basso, particularly evident in basketmaking that continually connects the people to the land and the resources it contains. While the community may assign meaning to the place in these terms, the relationship between humans and nature appears to resemble a worldview closer to Basso’s description of the Western Apache sense of place stalking.

The Mohawk sense of place and identity are the ultimate influences on the museum, and the cultural symbols that emerged throughout the three periods of Haudenosaunee history are present in every aspect of the museum. The Akwesasne Museum creates a different kind of interpretive space than what scholars such as Archibald and Glassberg advocate. Instead of taking on the authority to create and shape people’s sense of place, history, and identity, the Akwesasne Museum is concerned with simply presenting the strong ties the community already has with each of these elements. The museum has become a new type of basket, a vessel to hold and protect cultural symbols for the community. Like a basket, the museum is made from the materials, or ideas, that already exist in the place, and the community then shapes its design with cultural influences. As a basket, the museum becomes a new cultural symbol that holds meaning in maintaining connections to cultural traditions and other community members. The museum’s diverse patronage, coming from both inside and outside the community, creates interesting questions of who should have access to the cultural symbols the museum holds, and how the staff reflects to these two

groups in presentations of place and identity. Built to reflect and not dictate to a changing community, the museum is a unique case in discussions of making place.

While Archibald was arguing that historians “make” the place, which may not apply at Akwesasne, his ideas about the historian’s responsibility, in this case the museum’s responsibility, to reconnect community members with a sense of place was sound. For Akwesasne it is less about humans giving meaning to a place than it is about the place giving meaning to the people. Reconnecting people to place is one of the objectives of the Akwesasne museum as seen through programs that reconnect users to traditional arts and other community members. According to the mission statement, the museum’s main objective is to increase Akwesasne historic and cultural awareness to community members, surrounding communities, and the visiting public.²⁸¹ The museum is a space that encourages connections to traditional arts that develops connections between generations. Most importantly, these arts, particularly basketmaking, reconnect the people with the environment as well as a sense of their culture, history, and who they are as Akwesasne. The museum does not have to ascribe these meanings; rather the programming offered at the museum provides community members an opportunity to explore the meaning of place on an individual level. The Akwesasne Museum creates a space of community interaction that helps users negotiate how they remember place and what that means for the forming of their identity. This identity-work is further defined in the exhibition panels, where exhibits themselves have helped people realize what it means to be from Akwesasne.

The traditional museum is a place of power and adaptability, where those placed in authority positions make decisions regarding history and culture and present that to a

²⁸¹ Akwesasne mission statement, Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center Three Year Plan, Akwesasne Museum digital files, 2008.

viewing public. The museum places their staff in positions of power over interpretation, yet their work must ultimately serve the needs of the public, who can either accept or reject the information presented.²⁸² While the designs of exhibitions mean to reach a general audience, museums are places of personal reflection and identity building. John H. Falk Sea Grant Professor in Free-Choice Learning at Oregon State University, argues that museums helps to shape our learning, understanding of the world and even our identities that we carry with us once we have left the physical space. According to Falk's model for understanding the museum visitor experience, visitors are attracted to different types of museums based on identity-related motivations. The museum experience is not merely about how the museum presents information, but also how the visitor chooses to engage, or not engage, with that material and utilize it to inform his or her own sense of learning and identity. Based on this theory, the museum is a space of negotiation between the museum staff and the public.²⁸³

As a museum, the Akwesasne Museum must understand the needs of those patrons they are trying to reach. The mission statement extends the museums visitor base beyond the immediate community at Akwesasne to the surrounding non-Native communities as well, who undoubtedly have a different experience at the museum than do those from the community. Falk and his colleague Lynn D. Dierking argue, "All learning appears to be inextricably bound to the environment in which it occurs." Humans automatically try to make sense of their environments and place, and these places have a lasting emotional

²⁸² See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) for more information regarding the development of museums as institutions of power and exploitation.

²⁸³ John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2009), 35.

impact of the learner, even when they are not deliberately trying to remember them.²⁸⁴ The Akwesasne Museum's goal of reaching outside audiences as well as their own transforms the museum from a stable physical space into a place that transcends physical boundaries. The museum's traveling exhibits bring the place of Akwesasne to those who many have never visited. Attracting tourists to Akwesasne is a modern goal for the tribal government, and a new building for the museum is included in the plans. *Sharing the Spirit: An Akwesasne Cultural Tourism Strategy* addresses the opportunities available for the community if they actively attract visitors and share their place in the world with outsiders.²⁸⁵ The plans also include a welcome center, as well as a new Eco-Resort and Art Park in addition to the beautification of the roadways that run through the reservation.²⁸⁶ If these efforts are successful, the museum will have an opportunity to not only serve the immediate community, but also educate a large base of people outside the community.

An increasing number of outside visitors may force the staff to renegotiate the displays of the museum. As it stands now, the museum reflects the place from which created it, and does not have to dictate to community members how to connect to a sense of place and community, but offers the space and resources to reconnect and remember if one desires. More outsiders may mean the museum will need to include more or less explanation of these cultural symbols to serve the needs and wants of the Akwesasne community.

Melinda Lawlor, associate professor of English and American Studies explains that many

²⁸⁴ John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2000), 65.

²⁸⁵ St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, *Sharing the Spirit: An Akwesasne Tourism Strategy* (Akwesasne: St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Office of Economic Development, 2009). 13.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

Native communities that are open to tourism by outsiders practice what she terms “displayed withholding,” in which a group shows that something is not displayed because it is a secret that only community members have a right to know.²⁸⁷ For example, if the museum uses the Native language and does not translate it, the outside guest will not be aware of all the information presented in the display even though it is there. Those that have the knowledge to read the information will still be able to access it, offering a method of balancing the needs of both audiences. The community is able to protect sacred or secret knowledge while still offering a glimpse into the culture to the outside world.

This practice of “displayed withholding” appears to be common amongst Native communities that receive many cultural tourists. Christina Taylor Beard-Moose, an anthropologist that spent a number of summers living with the Eastern Band of Cherokee, discovered that often events or places held dual meaning, one for the Cherokee community not expressed to outsiders and another as a type of display or entertainment for tourist. Beard-Moose explains that in some cases the Cherokee museum completely omitted elements of Cherokee culture, such as the matrilineal clan system, in order to create a narrative that made the Cherokee appear to be just like the non-Native guests. This does not reflect how the Cherokee continue to organize their familial structures according to Beard-Moose, and further describes how tribal museums may shift their interpretations to fit the expectations of the visitors.²⁸⁸ The Akwesasne Museum, like any other tribal institution, must

²⁸⁷ Mary Lawlor, *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representation in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 5.

²⁸⁸ Christina Beard-Moose, *Public Indians, Private Cherokees: Tourism and Tradition on Tribal Grounds* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 115.

be aware of who their audience is and which elements of place and identity are best to display or keep secret.

The museum already practices some degree of “displayed withholding” simply due to limited amount of information that can be presented in a museum exhibition. Those who do not know the language cannot understand music played in Mohawk in the museum, but it offers non-Native guests an opportunity to hear what the language sounds like. In addition, outside guests will not fully understand the cultural symbols relating to a sense of place and identity included in the Haudenosaunee creation story if the museum displays a painting of the fall of Sky Woman but the rest of the story remained unexplained. These are elements of “displayed withholding” already in existence within the museum, and demonstrate how the museum was already negotiating two audiences.²⁸⁹ Using this method the museum was able to offer a different sense of place to various audiences. Since the place informs the elements included in the museum, the practice of “display withholding” was the closest the museum came to actively “making” place. Hidden messages within the exhibitions may constitute the creation of place for outsiders, but for the primarily patrons, the Akwesasne community, place was constructed by the individual and the museum simply holds cultural symbols that remind the community to reconnect with the sense of place which already exists.

Basketmaking Connecting Place to Museum

Deep connection to this place prevails in Mohawk oral traditions and stories that describe how one should relate to the environment that had remained Mohawk land for hundreds of years. Stories inform the generations about the past, but more importantly remind community members of how they should live in the present, particularly in how they

²⁸⁹ Akwesasne Museum. *Gathering Knowledges* exhibition, on exhibit at the Akwesasne Museum and Cultural Center, March 2010.

relate to place and home. Basketmaking is one traditional art form that connects the basketmaker to the earth through the materials used to create the basket, community members to each other through the learning of the craft, and to the past to the present through an art that survived many generations. The environment is influential in this craft, and seasonal designations for harvesting materials drives the basket making process. The importance of the environment to Akwesasne basketmaking and culture more generally is pronounced in oral histories and oral traditions. Oral traditions and interviews with Akwesasne basketmakers reveal how place and community define a sense of Akwesasne Mohawk identity translated in the museum.

Interviews with basketmakers and patrons to the museum conducted by the author provide a sense of the importance of the art and the institution to the community that regularly uses both. Additionally, the museum has a number of oral history collections in its holdings that document oral tradition and contemporary life within the community, including basketmaking. The stories recorded through the museum represent an inside view of the community, as it is one community entity receiving information from another, without the interference of an outside source. The interviews with basketmakers illuminate this point as Akwesasne community members who are also basketmakers conducted most interviews, creating a dual connection to the interviewee. These oral histories are unique in this sense, and provide this study with an insider's perspective that might not otherwise be available. Combining the authors interviews with community members and the museum's oral history collections provide a holistic view to how the community approaches the discussion of important cultural symbols, such as basketmaking, place, and the museum to other community members and outsiders.

The staff knows little about the cultural center's collection of thirty legends and oral traditions recorded in 1984, other than the occasional markings of the speaker and the recorder. The stories reveal the importance of places, animal and plant life, and seasons that inform how community members relate to the environment and what that means for the construction of identity. Likewise, the oral interviews with basketmakers conducted in 2006, as well as the interviews conducted by the author in 2012 present the importance of place, local materials, and assistance of other community members to the craft of making baskets. For some of these basketmakers, the sense of Akwesasne identity appears intertwined with their identity as a basketmaker, and the importance of this art to the continuation of culture permeates their discussions.

At Akwesasne, baskets emerge as a strong cultural symbol that ties together numerous important aspects of the culture including other cultural symbols. The basket uses cultural symbols such as the black ash tree and sweetgrass to create forms resembling cultural meaning such as strawberries and corn. Basketmaking is a process that requires a strong connection to both the land that produces the material to make the baskets and to other community members basketmakers often require some assistance from others at some step along the path to completion. Florence Benedict (Katsitsienhawi, “She carries flowers”) has woven baskets her entire life. Those within and outside the community know Benedict as one of the best basketmakers at Akwesasne. Seasonal cycles dictate the gathering of materials, but Benedict makes sure to have enough so that she can make baskets throughout the entire year. July through August, she picks the sweetgrass she will use in her baskets, in the past often accompanied by her late husband, Ernest Benedict (Kaientaronkwen, “He gathers the small sticks of wood as in ceremonial game”) and her daughter Rebecca Benedict

(Wenniseriiotha, “She makes the day nice”).²⁹⁰ Benedict spends hours during these months in fields of sweetgrass to ensure she has enough for the coming year of basketmaking.

The collection of sweetgrass is a time consuming process. The harvester must pick and clean each blade carefully either the finger or a wooden comb to remove stiff dry pieces. Harvesters must then tie the blades of grass into bundles and hang them to dry. As a final preparation, Benedict soaks and braids some of the grass for decoration on the baskets.²⁹¹ While she picks her own sweetgrass, Benedict must rely on other community members to gather the black ash splints she will need for her baskets. It is mostly men who create the splints for baskets. The first step requires locating trees of good quality for baskets. Trees must then be trimmed, peeled, and then “pounded” repeatedly with the blunt edge of an axe to encourage the wood to separate along annual growth rings. Once the harvester removes these strips, they must shave and split them into strips for weaving.²⁹² Before the weaving even begins, basketmaking demands an attention to the natural environment and a strong connection to others in the community.

The picking, bundling and braiding of sweetgrass remains a group activity, as demonstrated by Florence Benedict and her family who all contribute to the process. The season for picking is very distinct. Basketmaker, Annabelle Oakes explains, “It would be the first part of August, and we’d pick them. And then we’d get home, and we’d have to clean it

²⁹⁰ Kathleen Mundell, *North by Northeast: Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk and Tuscarora Traditional Arts* (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2008), 17.

²⁹¹ Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 57.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 40.

and dry them for use and then braiding, braiding it.”²⁹³ Judy Hemlock explains her family's group efforts to gather sweetgrass. “Her [Judy’s Grandmother] routine used to be...pick grass...they used to come home with bundles like this *she separates her hands to about two feet apart...*”²⁹⁴ With the company of family, this was her routine, and she would sit and braid sweetgrass through the winter. Once the basketmaker picked, cleaned, and dried the sweetgrass in the summer, the rest of the basketmaking process continued through the winter months and the rest of the year. The sweetgrass picking season starts the yearly cycle for the basketmaker, dictated by the environment that creates the materials, making an understanding of the place, land, and preparation of materials key to the basketmaking process.

The vanilla-like sent of the sweetgrass fills homes of basketmakers from August forward. This distinctive smell it part of the reason sweetgrass baskets are so unique and sought after. “No matter how old and dry the sweetgrass, once it is wet, the delightful fragrance comes back, even on older baskets.”²⁹⁵ Sweetgrass provides uses other than basketmaking. Some people burn it as a smudge or leave braids in their homes for the aroma. Harvesters sometimes smudge with sweetgrass as part of the picking process as well.

Barbara Grey explains:

I always believe you should give an offering for anything that you do you know if you go up to the sweetgrass then you should burn tobacco and give an offering and tell the plant what you are doing and then say your doing it in a way that’s not going to harm it and it will come back next year and it will appreciate it.

²⁹³ Annabelle Oakes interviewed by Charlotte King, August 15, 2006, transcript, “Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History” oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

²⁹⁴ Judy Hemlock interviewed by Charlotte King, August 8, 2006, transcript, “Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History” oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

²⁹⁵ Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 57.

The process of cleaning and preparing the materials once gathered was a community activity. Annabelle Oakes remembers during her childhood, “They’d help each other...one lady would probably clean the splints, and organize a dozen, and then the other ones, it was like a circle, the other ones would make a bottom, and the other ones would make a thing, uh, ending it. It, it was like uh...assembly line.”²⁹⁶ Braiding parties were social occasions and sometimes the host gave out prizes for who made the longest braid or braided the fastest.²⁹⁷

In recent years, the scarcity of basketmaking materials initiated methods to ensure their protection and continued growth. Barbara Grey explains: “well sweet is getting harder to get but people who have been protecting it are forgetting where it is. That’s a restoration project that really should be here they need to restore that here. I have a raised garden and it has sweet grass in it, which I harvest.”²⁹⁸ This raises interesting questions about allowing information about where materials grow to be limited to a few in order to prevent over-harvesting. Some basketmakers, like Grey, are now growing their own to ensure they have a supply for their baskets, should more locations be lost to memory. Basketmakers take care to ensure that the harvesting, even in these private gardens, protects the plant for future growth. Not all locations at Akwesasne encourage growth. Deb Cook Jacobs explains that she had her own sweetgrass garden, but recently had to get rid of it, stating that it “was not in the right place” and that “it was not meant to be.”²⁹⁹ She notes that the museum serves an

²⁹⁶ Annabelle Oakes, interview.

²⁹⁷ Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 57-58.

²⁹⁸ Barbara Grey interviewed by Charlotte King, August 21, 2006, transcript, “Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History” oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

²⁹⁹ Deb Cook Jacobs interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 13, 2012.

important function in access to basketmaking materials, noting that she often buys her sweetgrass from the museum. As a center for basketmaking activities, the museum maintains connections with harvesters of both sweetgrass and ash, providing a space for basketmakers to locate materials if they encounter difficulties on their own. The museum connects community members to materials in a number of ways; offering the materials for sale through the museum, providing contact information for harvesters so that basketmakers can seek out materials on their own, and by supplying materials as a part of basketmaking classes.

Methods for harvesting vary and basketmakers dispute over the best way to gather sweetgrass while still ensuring that the grass will continue to grow. Delia Cook explains:

When I was going picking sweetgrass I just pull it. Hold on to the top and follow it down to the roots and pull it. And you know how easy it is to get a whole root of it but the way it was told to be is that the seeds come up early and the seeds are already back down on the ground by the time we got to pick it. So some say, um, you cut it with the scissors and some say no, the seeds have already fallen to the earth so you don't need to.³⁰⁰

Barbara Grey advocates cutting the grass, "I think that one time people just yanked it, but even that was not a healthful way to do it. You should cut it about an inch or two above the ground. Cut it, don't pull it, 'cause (sic) that's the only way it propagates."³⁰¹ When asked if she agrees that by some account you need to pull out the root in order to aerate the ground so the grass has room to grow, Grey denies that this could be true. "I think that if you do it [cut] and do it with a clean cut and leave the root to grow then it's not going to make itself more it's just going to breed up."³⁰² The method of gathering sweetgrass while still allowing

³⁰⁰ Delia Cook interviewed by Charlotte King, August 15, 2006, transcript, "Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History," oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

³⁰¹ Barbara Grey, interview.

³⁰² Ibid.

for growth in the next year was important to basketmakers even if they dispute the methods to do so. Both black ash and sweetgrass require special care to ensure the continuation of basketmaking within the community. Each natural material has a deep importance to basketmaking and the ability of the community to hold tightly to their heritage that is specific to the people and the place.

The sound of the pounding of logs was something memorable to most at Akwesasne that links place and time. “The men would be pounding on the river and they could actually...actually like talk,” according to Grey. “Like communicate through the pounding up and down the river they could actually hear them up and down the river...I thought that was kinda (sic) a neat thing of history that a lot of people have lost you know?”³⁰³

Basketmaker Judy Hemlock recalled, “Every house had a log in their yard. And they pounded all day long. Cause you could hear early in the morning, that’s all you could hear is this pounding.”³⁰⁴ Hemlock demonstrated the sound of the pounding on tape, tapping on the table, to display the rhythmic motion of the work. Deb Cook Jacobs shared similar experiences, “growing up, you could hear them [the men] in the morning pounding logs. That was a real common sound in the morning. It was mostly a comforting sound to hear people pounding the logs.”³⁰⁵

Pounding began so early in the morning that “they didn’t need roosters,” said Barbara Grey as the pounders would be out before the church bells rang at six o’clock. “It

³⁰³ Barbara Grey, interview

³⁰⁴ Judy Hemlock interviewed by Charlotte King, August 8, 2006, transcript, “Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History” oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

³⁰⁵ Deb Cook Jacobs interviewed by Sue Ellen Herne, October 6, 2006, transcript, “Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History” oral history collection, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

was kinda (sic) noisy for a long time, we've got a noisy history...I really like the pounding logs down here."³⁰⁶ "Pounding in the St. Regis early in the morning and it used to sound so nice it was almost like making up to the birds singing it was an even calling sound and it sounded so nice." Recalled Delia Cook, "And the sound would come and the water would come from wherever they were on the island."³⁰⁷ Pounding, by all the basketmakers accounts, is a sound that is distinctly Akwesasne.

The pounder is extremely important to the outcome of the basket. Basketmaker Delia Cook explained, "If the pounder doesn't know how to pound you will not get a good straight, what do you call that...some people will pound and skip a spot and pound and skip a spot and when you come to fix your splint it's not even straight. It's thin, thick, thin, thick, and you can't round it and it's very hard to work with."³⁰⁸ With this type of material, Cook explained, the basket will not be nice and instead will be uneven and will not be uniform. It is an error that one cannot correct after the pounding process, and Cook indicated, "I doubt if it's the tree itself [that causes the problem]. It's the pounder."³⁰⁹ At least one community member today has a mechanical pounder that pounds the wood evenly to help solve the problem of bad splints.³¹⁰ A good basket needs a skilled weaver, but also requires the gathering and preparation of high quality natural materials. Each basketmaker knows which

³⁰⁶ Barbara Grey, interview.

³⁰⁷ Delia Cook, interview.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ I had the opportunity to see the mechanical pounder during a tour through Akwesasne with Richard David. The man who created the pounder also supplies basketmaking materials to basketmakers in the community through the shop in his garage. Field visit by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Territory, New York, April 12, 2012.

pounders they can rely on for quality splints. It was a community process and each step along the way was crucial.

A strong knowledge and communion with the natural environment is important to the craft of basketmaking. Harvesters must gather in particular locations and at certain points in the year. Everything has a season. The gathering of sweetgrass occurs in the late summer, most often in August. Sarah Lazore in her Native Mohawk language described how the season affects the health of the plant. “Tanon ne tkaiatakweniio tsiniwakenhoten ne tsiniiohontes. Nonwa, waotiiianerasten. Kahontiio. Toka iah thaitiiianerasten kenk niiawenekeres. *The quality of the sweetgrass depends on the season. This was a good season. The sweetgrass is good. During a bad season the sweetgrass is short.*”³¹¹ Lazore further explains that the color of the ash is dependent on when one cuts the tree. “Ne kanonnaraken ne koserake nikahawi kaiakon. April ionsaotiwhaeste tsiniioire August tsinatekiatere iah tekanonniio. *The splint is white when it is cut during the winter. The splint is not good between April and August.*”³¹² Crucial to the quality and color of baskets is the knowledge of which season to harvest the materials that create the base for the basket before the application of a design or form.

Barbara Grey indicated that there is a life span for basket materials once cut. She describes the dilemma with a log she purchased with the intention of having it pounded. “I buy my splints already split.” Grey says, “Although when the Boys and Girls Club had brought logs from Kahnawake I bought a log and brought it over to my uncle’s house and he was going to have that guy... pound my log for me there at his house but he ended up passing away so that log never got used.” Grey indicated that too much time may have

³¹¹ Sarah Lazore interviewed by Rokwaho, Akwesasne Notes, (Vol. 15, Iss. 3, June 30, 1983), 4.

³¹² Ibid.

passed since then, and that the log may no longer be viable as a basket log. “you know it might be too old by now cause it really need to be it should be pounded right away or put it in water.”³¹³ There is a season and time limit for all elements in the basketmaking process and it requires a keen understanding of the natural environment to get all the elements just right.

Natural resources that are essential to basketmaking at Akwesasne are under threat of extinction, particularly the black and brown ash. Basketmakers who harvest the trees note that the conditions of these trees are so poor that one two or three trees out of a stand of hundreds is suitable for making baskets. The degradation of trees due to pollution, insect damage, disease, and acid rain concerned basketmakers for years. Delia Cook believes that environmental changes dramatically affected the craft. “I find today the splints some of them today are not as sturdy as they were.” She explains:

Some of the older people that I learned from say that about splints are already not as good as they were when they started cause of the environment it all changes. And still today myself I don’t know about the others myself I’m still trying to splints that I can’t even use...can’t even split some are too thin I think that the way the world is changing.³¹⁴

She further describes that the splints she purchased in recent years appear rotted. “It’s like a...a like a metal when its rusty that’s what it looks like on the splint.”³¹⁵ Bad splints are a growing concern amongst weavers, as Judy Hemlock also describes having trouble locating good splints. “The splints I have today are terrible, terrible, terrible,” she exclaims,

“I got it from Antoine on the Island where they said he had real good splints, so I was after him for a long time before I ever touched base with him and I went there

³¹³ Barbara Grey, interview.

³¹⁴ Delia Cook, interview.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

one day and I made arrangements. And I went there and I bought five bundles and every damn one is awful. Ugh, they're terrible."³¹⁶

Harvesters utilize particular methods to locate trees good for baskets, yet environmental factors have taken their toll on the wood, which is an ever growing problem for the community.

The most recent threat is the emerald ash borer beetle which is slowly moving toward the area from the Great Lakes region. Many within Akwesasne, as well as scientists, environmentalists and individuals from other basket-making communities in the northeast are taking efforts to prevent the extinction of the tree. For fifteen years, Les Benedict and Richard David collected and replanted seeds, putting at least 60,000 seedlings back into the Ontario, Quebec and New York State area. However, this is an uphill battle, the men explained. "We start out with a big number and we end up with a few good trees," said David, "If we prepare a hundred seeds, we are lucky if we get eight trees planted in three years."³¹⁷ On a tour through Akwesasne, Richard David explained the importance of areas of forest preservation. The Environmental Division at Akwesasne had a portion of the land within the community's boundaries as a protected cultural area due to its good black ash trees. Particularly good trees for basketmaking or for harvesting seeds are the focus of the preserve, and they take great care to trim back anything else so that other species do not take away resources from the ash trees. David explained that even though it is a conservation area, the community trusts basketmakers to go in and collect logs for baskets if they need it. "We know our basketmakers aren't going to go in and destroy the place," said David, "So, if they go in, then they go in...We have a lot of faith and trust in them. Because it is their

³¹⁶ Judy Hemlock, interview.

³¹⁷ Mudell, *North by Northeast*, 43.

resource that they need to help protect too."³¹⁸ These natural resources are not just important to basketmaking, but to the sense of place and identity to the people of that place, making the effort to protect the trees so important. If Akwesasne were to lose the trees, and therefore basketmaking, a deep loss would be felt within the culture and community.

Some community members, such as Barbara Grey, feel that over depletion of the ash trees by humans has had a dramatic effect on the decline of basketmaking at Akwesasne. She suggests, "I don't know whether so much of it is the over harvesting of Black Ash or the taking of wet lands ... I think it's just that over depletion of the product. So we don't have enough for other basket makers."³¹⁹ Grey mainly attributes this to the saw mills in the area that cut down a high number of ash trees. She argued that the basketmakers did not cause a reduction in the availability of the trees, but that outside impacts have depleted the forests and left little that was viable for baskets. The reality could be a combination of human influence and other forces such as disease that make it difficult to locate good wood for baskets. Whatever the cause, all are in agreement that if this valuable tradition is to survive, protection of the trees is a necessity.

Threats to important natural materials at Akwesasne are not new, and do not always have successful conclusions. Legends and stories maintain the past for future generations and also mourn the loss of aspects of the land that changed after contact with Europeans. *Rontkontserarakwaskeve*, or Red Dye, was once collected on the sides of steep banks along the St. Lawrence River, "long ago before the Seaway," the speaker explained. "At that time the land was the way Mother Nature prepared it...it was the perfect nest place for the swallows.

³¹⁸ Richard David interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Territory, New York, April 12, 2012.

³¹⁹ Barbara Grey, interview.

There were thousands of them. It was a regular breeding spot.” The speaker articulated that the red liquid dripped from the deserted birds’ nests created a dye used to paint canoes, and possibly other crafts. “This disappeared with the passing of the large ships which caused large swells to reach high on the banks and frightened birds away. This also caused the sandy banks to fall into the river and destroy their habitat. As a result the birds are gone from that place.”³²⁰ This loss meant enough to become an oral tradition that reminds those in the present of cultural practices that can no longer continue without certain natural resources. Basketmaking demonstrates how integrated the natural world is to Akwesasne culture and identity, making efforts to save the black ash a high priority.

Basketmaking was both a family and a community event, as older generations pass the art to their children and, more often, their grandchildren. Many of the basketmakers interviewed noted that these aspects of the craft are still important, though they may be less perceptible in the community today. “I think a lot of families in the older days used to make baskets together. It was kind of like the old everybody had a duty and a job.”³²¹ For many of the basketmakers interviewed, picking up in family craft was a natural progression that they grew up embracing. Judy Hemlock could not recall when she started making baskets. She explains:

Well I can’t really say... I have been all my life, ever since I was born, because my great grandmother was an avid basket maker and so was my grandmother, and with my grandmothers who I grew up with. And... with my grandmother I grew up with her and there was always baskets around. I mean...in them days you learned from your mother or whomever you lived with, for the simple reason that you didn’t sit around³²²

³²⁰ Unknown speaker, *Rontkontserarakwaskwe* or *Red Dye*, Akwesasne Museum files, June 22, 1984, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Judy Hemlock, interview.

Her grandchildren, she noted, are harder enthuse about basketmaking. She recalled having to convince her grandson to clean splints with her. Hemlock, like many of the other basketmakers interviewed, feel it is harder to get younger kids excited about basketmaking. Collectively the basketmakers feel that in their own experience, they just picked it up because that was simply what the family unit did and they grew up around it. As the craft became less prevalent in homes, methods of learning changed. Deb Cook Jacobs explained the importance of the museum in their basketmaking. Cook credits learning basketmaking to Salli Benedict who was the museum director in the 1980s and advocated for basketmaking in the museum. She noted that she learned from the classes offered by the museum.³²³ Teaching community members the art of basketmaking remains the objective of the museum's classes and in recent years, they emphasize getting younger generations involved so that all ages within the community continue to learn and evolve the practice.

The connection between children and grandparents is important to the art of basketmaking. Many basketmakers interviewed discussed learning from their grandmothers, even if their mothers were basketmakers as well. The exposure to the craft was often at a young age. Annabelle Oakes remembered, “I bet you it was my grandma who started to teach me how to make baskets when I was about 6 or 7 years old.” At such a young age, Oakes learned the basics of weaving. “...she had me...weaving sweetgrass. Got the hang of it, and she had me onto the covers to her baskets. And I always got to do that for starters.”³²⁴ She recalled learning her techniques from her grandmother and not her mother.

³²³ Deb Cook Jacobs interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Cook's Home, Hogansburg, New York, April 13, 2012.

³²⁴ Annabelle Oakes, interview.

“My mother, yeah, my mother made baskets too...she didn’t teach me how to make it...but my grandma did.”³²⁵ Similar discussions of it being “easier” to learn “one step away” are apparent across the interviews, and suggest strongly that basketmaking not only brings together community members, but also reinforces ties between generations. The museum accepts students of all ages. A filled workroom usually contains children, their parents, and elders all at once. At a class taught by Henry Arquette in April of 2012, a young woman of high school age simultaneously learned from and assisted women in the class twice her age and older. Getting the younger generation involved in basketmaking ensures the continuation of the art for the future but also serves to educate the next generation about the community's past as participants share stories and important cultural information during classes.

Judy Hemlock also learned to make baskets from her grandmother. Hemlock has a lot of respect for her grandmother, who she felt embraced the entire process of basketmaking. A real community affair, women not only learned from their grandmothers, but also a number of other women in the community during braiding or weaving parties. Basketmaking was a really a group effort, and many basketmaker recalled being influenced by a number of basketmakers of an older generation rather than having one individual tutor. Annabelle Oakes explains,

When I was born, about 1929, it must have been in the 30s, but anyways, there wasn’t a lot of money around in them days... women would [get] a group I guess, they’d go from one house, they’d finish their baskets, they’d get done, they’d go to somebody [else’s house]...the [eight of them would] go around helping each other.³²⁶

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Annabelle Oakes, interview.

In the process of traveling from one basketmaker's house to another, Oakes's grandmother exposed her to a number of different styles and techniques.

Hemlock described these group basketmaking efforts as "basket bees." Women would get together to complete baskets, usually with some goal in mind, like the state fair where they would sell their baskets. A primary source of income for many basketmakers, having enough material to sell was important and having a support system of other basketmakers was a necessary part of the work that was not only about making baskets but also about making social connections and sharing meals. "But they, in those basket bees though they sure had a lot of fun, you know." Hemlock explains, "And all of a sudden it was time my grandmother would get up and cook. She would go to the kitchen make biscuits and fry salt pork and fifteen minutes later, they'd (sic) be eating. They'd get done eating and they'd go right back over there [to weave]."³²⁷ Hemlock even recalls that basketmakers such as Mary Thomas never made baskets on her own, so these group gatherings were essential to keeping some involved in the craft. Richard David said that his favorite aspect of basketmaking is working with other basketmakers. "You share stories and share techniques," He explains, "you share basket styles...it's a really nice exchange. And it's fun, especially if we get some elderly people with us, they really can tell the stories about black ash, and how to get a log, and what makes the best log. I really enjoy that part of it."³²⁸ Today, the museum's classes serve to fulfill the social demand of the art, providing a space for interaction, learning, and practice.

³²⁷ Judy Hemlock, interview.

³²⁸ Richard David, interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Territory, New York, April 12, 2012.

The art of innovation and experimentation continues with the next generation. Some interviewed indicated that their children enjoy making baskets as well and that they retain certain styles that are difficult to remember. Annabelle Oakes notes.

I even taught my kids to make [fish baskets] 'cause (sic) they thought that was something, you know, making the fish. And I forgot how to do it, and the only ones that remember is two of my boys that now they know how to do it. And I asked Allan, I says, uh, 'Show me how to do that' and he says 'You're the one who taught me how to do it.' Well I forgot because I never do it, and then he does it so fast that I can't keep up with him."³²⁹

Oakes's statement reveals the importance of continually practicing the craft to prevent the loss of styles and techniques to memory. Working in community groups assists in retaining styles, as one basketmaker can remind another of certain techniques. Barbara Grey recalled, "I think every single person I learned from taught me something new."³³⁰ While the community credits some styles to individual basketmakers, they share ideas with others, allowing basketmaking to be a craft that balances the individual artist with the community.

There are two distinct types of Akwesasne baskets, utility baskets and fancy baskets. After the pounder pounds the wood, the splints require further preparation to get ready for weaving. V-shaped tools called splitters of various gauges, separate the splints further to the right thickness according to the basketmaker's needs. Only a few in the community make these tools, including the man with the mechanical pounder. At this point that the basketmaker designates which wood splints are best for either a utility basket or a fancy basket. Usually, thinner, narrower splints are used in fancy baskets that are worked with sweetgrass and do not need to be as sturdy. The thicker splints are set aside for use in utility, or work baskets, traditionally made for use in farming, on the water, or as packs for carrying.

³²⁹ Annabelle Oakes, interview.

³³⁰ Barbara Grey, interview.

Utility baskets need to be strong for this type of heavy use, though today buyers desire them for their esthetic beauty as well.³³¹

Utility baskets are made entirely of black ash splints and contain no dyes, allowing the beauty of the baskets to emerge from their simple forms and clean lines. Basketmakers weave baskets around forms called blocks or a mold, of varying shapes and sizes that determine their form and function. Using a method called plaiting; they weave the splints up these forms and follow the contour of the shape to produce the desired basket. Passing these molds through generations was a common practice and ensured certain styles remain within the family. Blocks and the plaiting process developed in the mid-1880s and are prominent among basket making communities in the American northeast, including the Haudenosaunee, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy.³³²

Molds take time to perfect, as Barbara Grey explains. When discussing her ear of corn shaped baskets, Grey explains, “I’m not happy with that bottom because of that mold.” Grey had changed the mold a number of times. “Course that took me...almost...three years to perfect what I thought was perfected,” she says, “I mean you never really get it where you want it but it’s pretty close the ear of corn I make now.”³³³ Taking so much time to create the perfect mold proves one more step in the process to creating new styles, which are then maintained by passing the mold to others in the family. The museum holds its own collection of molds in its workroom that pass from student to student, as they learn to weave.

³³¹ Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 61.

³³² Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 65.

³³³ Barbara Grey, interview.

Utility baskets originally served a variety of purposes for the Akwesasne that assisted in everyday activities. The shapes and weaving styles for each use persists in baskets today. For example, pack baskets are often tall with a wide belly used to carry equipment on ones back and potato baskets are round and sturdy with a heavy handle, since they needed to hold heavy potato crops during harvesting. One weaves corn-washing baskets in a twill weave to clean the corn previously boiled in ashes. The design washes away the ashes and the hulls while maintaining the full kernels of the corn.³³⁴ Utilized for the same function or not, the designs remain the same. Some of the basketmakers actually fear the use of baskets for such work tasks. One interviewee noted that if you have a beautiful white basket, you do not want to ruin it by using it to collect berries because the wood will stain.

Utility and fancy baskets come in all shapes and sizes. Barbara Grey remembered that her mentor, Irene Richmond used to make large twelve inch sowing baskets.³³⁵ More popular are baskets about seven or eight inches in diameter, which always sold according to Judy Hemlock. The various sizes, styles, and weaving techniques utilized in fancy baskets demonstrate the malleability of the material that a designer can easily shape to match their imagination. As basket making transforms from being a necessity into a luxury art, new styles emerge. Sweetgrass is prevalent in fancy baskets and adds another texture and color to the designs as it adds a great aroma to the basket. The smell of sweetgrass attracts many basket collectors. Charlotte King, an Akwesasne artist who conducted many of the interviews with basketmakers noted, “before they had a lot and that’s why they sold because they had a lot

³³⁴ Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 69.

³³⁵ Barbara Grey, interview.

of sweet grass they bought it for the aroma”³³⁶ King addressed a period thirty or forty years ago, when using a lot of sweetgrass in the basket was popular. Through her discussion with Barbara Grey, the two women determined that this technique is resurfacing in the community, even as sweetgrass becomes scarcer. Potential buyers are looking for sweetgrass in the designs, and this seems to be a driving factor in basketmakers using more of it in recent years. However, both women acknowledge that this method could be in danger with the limited supply of sweetgrass.³³⁷

Fancy Baskets usually include sweetgrass, even if just around the rim to provide a nice aroma. Using sweetgrass sparingly for some baskets has a long history. Judy Hemlock explained, “The only time my grandmother used sweetgrass was for decorating with the braid, beginning a cover, beginning a bottom, and finishing the rim with the sweetgrass.”³³⁸ Though the sweetgrass was not the primary aspect of the basket, it was included in all sections of the basket. Using the sweetgrass on the bottom of the basket also makes it sturdier, according to Hemlock, since they would not have big holes. Hemlock articulates, “My grandmother always started real close with the sweetgrass because its small...and the grass is thin.”³³⁹ She then alternated between the grass and the ash splint spokes to create a sturdy foundation. Sweetgrass is not simply for decoration or aroma, but is a powerful binding method to start basket foundations.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Barbara Grey, interview.

³³⁸ Judy Hemlock, interview.

³³⁹ Ibid.

Fancy baskets offer the opportunity to experiment with different styles and colors. Dying the splints became popular and many baskets contain vibrant and deep colors. The environment assists in this as well, even as more basket makers are using commercial dyes to create the strong colors. Delia Cook explained that the sun plays an important role in the dying process, and that even with commercial dyes, “the sun will treat it.”³⁴⁰ Even with the dyes, Cook noted the popularity of sweetgrass and its natural color. “A lot of people like that natural color,” she explains, and the sun even plays a role in treating the sweetgrass as well. Drying the sweetgrass in the sun maintains the scent and the color so that they will stay with the basket for years to come.

Basketmaking retains important cultural value to Akwesasne while it also provides financial stability. Judy Hemlock describes many in her grandmother’s generation only making baskets to support themselves financially. Today, individuals find it difficult for basketmaking to serve as their only income; however, it still supplies necessary supplemental income for many. The change in styles over time according to the interviews reflect both a growth in the practice becoming an “art” as opposed to a necessity, as well as changing demands on the commercial market. Even today, many basketmakers want to sell their baskets, and changing market values for baskets can determine which styles they produce, creating an interesting dynamic between cultural expression and commercial gain. In comparing change in styles overtime, Barbara Grey remarked, “I think that back then in my personal opinion is that...there were very limited styles. I think today we’re getting into more of the art form of it...and baskets [in the past] seem to be bigger than in today.”³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Delia Cook, interview.

³⁴¹ Barbara Grey, interview.

Grey attributed part of the reason the need to sell baskets on the market, explaining that many contemporary buyers do not want to pay for larger baskets. Baskets became smaller in size to ensure buyers interest. Recent years showed a shift to more intricate and colorful baskets attributed to the fact that most basketmakers are not relying on the baskets for their primary source of income. The increased time spent on each basket suggests a desire for uniqueness and quality rather than quantity. Contemporary basketmakers are using the craft as a form of artistic expression instead of a means for survival.

In all the designs and styles, the crucial elements of what the land offers the community was at the core of their creation. The baskets could not exist were it not for a deep understanding and appreciation for the place if which they are created. Community cooperation remains essential to the process as basketmakers rely on one another to help gather materials and offer suggestions on techniques and styles. One basket style in particular, created by Florence Benedict, tied all of these elements together. Benedict has created a series of large round baskets made of black ash and sweetgrass that she calls “Globe Baskets.” These baskets meant to represent Mother Earth, made from the materials she provides. To the Mohawks, sweetgrass is the hair of Mother Earth, and the utilization of it in the globe baskets, as well as any fancy baskets, note the importance of the hair in tying all things together. Benedict’s Friendship, Peace and Respect basket in her Globe Basket series uses sweetgrass collected from traditional Mohawk lands throughout the Adirondacks. She uses a motif around the center of the basket reminiscent of a wampum belt, symbolizing friendship. On the top of the basket, Benedict included a sweetgrass braid as an offering to the Creator. The basket represents the connection between humans and the earth, and Benedict hopes it inspires people to work to preserve and protect Mother Earth. Representing all of the elements of place and community, Benedicts Friendship, Peace, and

Respect basket demonstrates how baskets hold each of these elements in close connection to each other.³⁴²

Despite concerns that the younger generations would not understand importance of the basketmaking, the art is currently making a comeback. As an element that holds together the community and grounds it solidly in the environment, baskets are a cultural symbol for a sense of place and community. Environment changes that threatened black ash and sweet grass remind the community of their responsibility to the land that holds their home. A determination to protect both drives the community to become environmental focused and recognize their cultural relationship with the natural world. Akwesasne culture would not exist in the same way without basketmaking, making it a practice that will remain no matter the obstacles. Baskets continue to provide a constant reminder to the community of who they are and where they come from.

Basketmakers say that the hardest part of a basket to make is the lid. It must perfectly mimic the shape created by the rest of the basket in order for it to fit properly and make a solid seal.³⁴³ The museum in its negotiations between two cultures is in a constant state of creating the lid for the vessel that is the museum, two different parts finding greater meaning once they come together. The museum highlights the uniqueness that is Akwesasne, but it also must be careful not to reveal too much cultural information for fear of its destruction. Places must be shared, at least within the community, in order for their meaning to have a cultural impact, however if the wrong people become aware of its meaning, there is a risk of destruction of materials and resource essential to the preservation

³⁴² Mundell, *North by Northeast*, 19.

³⁴³ Basketmaker's interviews, *Basketmaking in Akwesasne: A History*. Oral history Files, Akwesasne Museum at the Akwesasne Library and Cultural Center. Hogansburg, New York.

of the craft. As an institution working with its community while speaking with a larger audience, the museum serves as a negotiator of multiple viewpoints and concerns.

As a cultural symbol of the Akwesasne community, baskets embody the importance of place to the people and the past to the present and future. It is a symbol the museum protects, presents, and propagates in the community. The museum utilizes baskets for to create a means for collaboration with the community by inviting them into the museum space to view baskets, learn about baskets, and participate in classes where they can learn and talk about baskets. Basketmaking is an important cultural symbol because it offers a way to learn about history and culture while also participating in its creation and preservation. Instead of limiting community members to the role of museum "visitor," the museum classes create museum "users." As users of the museum, community members feel a sense of ownership over what happens in the museum. The institution is a welcoming and comfortable space for them to return to time and again. Actively participating in the museum classes teach valuable cultural skills and encourage communication among community members as it also encourages them to view exhibitions for inspiration. Becoming familiar with the space due to the classes, community members are comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas regarding exhibits, programming and collections, creating an exchange between the museum staff and the community unprecedented in other institutions. These are lasting and meaningful relationships that do not diminish once a class ends, as nearly all those interviewed visit the museum on a regular basis and for various reasons. These relationships have less to do with the small size of the community and more to do with the museum actively providing ways for the community to get involved and remain involved in the museum's activities. Basketmaking allows the museum to connect the community to a sense of place, providing a means for the voices of the people and landscape

to incorporate into museum programming and exhibitions. Utilizing cultural symbols in this way encourages communication, negotiation of different ideas, and the strengthening of ties between the museum and community.

Museums are usually places of cultural negotiation, and the Akwesasne Museum by nature of its goals must find the best methods to present a sense of place without trying to dictate its meaning to individuals within the community. Unlike the arguments by public historians that express the need to educate a public about the meaning of a place under the assumption that they do not know for themselves what the place already means, the Akwesasne Museum allows the community to speak to its own relationship with place. The cosmology of the Mohawks, as well as traditional practices such as basketmaking, already provides that sense of place for the community. The Museum is a vessel, or basket, utilized for the protection of that sense of place and identity. The museum does not need to fear change as the community evolves, but can offer elements that remind the community where they came from and who they are. Ultimately, the museum serves as a space for community learning and personal growth, assisting its users in forming their own sense of identity, and what it means to be from Akwesasne.

CHAPTER 6

POLITICS OF THE MUSEUM SHARING AUTHORITY AND CONTROVERSY

"If the belt does indeed represent the Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship between the Seven Nations of Canada and the British Crown, it is extremely relevant to us today. I contend that this is the "border crossing treaty" that the Canadian government says does not exist. The "Lake Champlain Corridor" would basically equate to the border between the United States and Canada in modern times. Perhaps someone should tell the MCA (the one in Akwesasne, not Lynyrd Skynyrd's record company) to bring this up at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights."-Darren Bonaparte³⁴⁴

Akwesasne is not immune to controversy. The Mohawk have a long history of political activism for Native sovereign rights for their own communities and for others as many Mohawk individuals participated in the American Indian Movement during the Red Power years and continue to remain active in civil rights and political issues that affect their communities. Conflicts with the United States and Canada regarding land rights, customs policies, and border crossing, are seemingly a continuous part of life for generations at Akwesasne. Akwesasne rests in two different countries, and three different states/provinces, New York, Quebec, and Ontario, and each affect the political environment within Saint Regis. Internally, three governmental bodies are at work, the traditional government or Longhouse called the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne on the Canadian side, and the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe on the United States side. The three governments often must work together particularly concerning issues of jurisdiction, land rights, and border crossing. Collaboration and compromise can prove challenging, and many issues concerning the land and community create a division of opinions. The Akwesasne Museum leave these controversial topics untouched and exhibits

³⁴⁴ Darren Bonaparte, "The Wolf Belt: 'As Long as Water Runs, Skies Do Shine, And Night Brings Rest' The Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship Returns to Akwesasne," *The Wampum Chronicles* (2007), accessed, Dec 2012, <http://www.wampumchronicles.com/wolfbelt.html>

only hint at the more serious issues of life in Saint Regis. The museum chooses instead to display images of unity in traditional arts and the more pleasant aspects of the community's history in order to allow all to feel welcome and prevent controversy. Serving as a negotiator for all community members, the museum's efforts to share authority with the community also lead to the presentation of a basic version of the past that avoids conflict or negativity.

The museum's choice to display a "watered-down" version of history does not solely rest on their efforts to share authority with the community. Many non-native, mainstream institutions also tend to avoid controversy in order to prevent anyone from feeling excluded from the institution. Most museums do not want to create political dissent to exhibitions that may drive audiences away. The discussion of the responsibility of cultural institutions to encourage discourse over difficult points in history directly links to shared authority with the public. Public backlash to an exhibition can occur if the institution is not aware of the opinions and concerns of their communities, yet the duty the institution feels to educate the public creates a question of how much politics is involved in sharing authority, and how politics affect the outcome of an exhibition. Examining the political environment at Akwesasne, the efforts to share authority at the museum, and the ultimate presentations in the exhibitions at the museum, this chapter argues that politics do not inhibit the sharing of authority within museums, though the political environment directly informs the interpretation gained through power sharing with diverse communities. Politics do affect the exhibits in the Akwesasne Museum, but these are same external politics that affect every museum regardless of how they are working with their communities. Sharing power with a community does not create or discourage controversy. The success of power sharing programs at the Akwesasne Museum among the complexity of the political environment at

Akwesasne demonstrates that museums cannot use a desire to avoid controversy as an excuse to ignore its community.

The Wolf Belt

Cultural symbols provide tangible methods for encouraging the sharing of authority within museums since they have the ability to connect the public with aspects of culture all community members share. Some cultural symbols, such as basketmaking, possess the ability to bring community members of all generations together, encouraging a sense of place, culture, and history without much resistance or conflict. Other cultural symbols are inherently political and it can be a struggle for museums to present if they are trying to avoid controversy. For the Akwesasne Museum, the Akwesasne Wolf Belt recently repatriated from the New York State Museum is the object in the collection that carries the most political significance. Like baskets, the belt speaks to a connection between the community and concepts of place, but the belt holds further questions of property rights, sovereignty, and issues of border-crossing, all of which are relevant to the current political environment at Akwesasne.

In recent years, the primary story attached to the belt was one of repatriation and community ownership. Housed in the New York State Museum for over a century, the official notice of intent to repatriate from the museum occurred in 2004.³⁴⁵ The notice establishes the belt's culturally affiliation with the Saint Regis Band of Mohawk Indians of New York and the Akwesasne Mohawk community based on the records and published reports of the sale of the belt to the museum. Even with the undisputed cultural patrimony of the belt and the museum's intentions to repatriate, the three governments at Akwesasne

³⁴⁵ Notice of Intent to Repatriate a Cultural Item: New York State Museum, Albany, New York, Federal Register Doc. 04-16147, Vol. 69 No. 136, July 16, 2004.

spent another six years preparing for the placement of the belt in its permanent home at the museum. In 2008, the New York State Museum repatriated the belt but the community placed in a temporary storage for another two years on Cornwall Island until the completion of the new room for it at the Akwesasne Museum.³⁴⁶ Finally, a ceremonial return of the belt to the community on September 17, 2010, included numerous community members, a canoe transport of the belt across the Saint Lawrence Seaway, traditional lunch, speakers, and performances by local singers.³⁴⁷ The day included a passing of the belt to all who participated, symbolizing that it belonged to the entire community rather than one individual. The preparation and ceremony involved in the return to Akwesasne demonstrates its importance to Akwesasronon, but it lacks a solid understanding of what the belt means or represents. Most public accounts of the return of the belt describe multiple interpretations for its meaning to the community. Accounting for all viewpoints, the museum chose to interpret the belt as holding multiple meanings in the exhibit instead of tracing its history through scholarly resources.

The exhibit for the Wolf Belt enthusiastically presents the story of the repatriation of the belt. Photo albums and an electronic screen display images of the ceremonial return of the belt directly in front of the Wolf Belt Room. On the wall, the text from the keynote speech by Jake Swamp given the day of the belt's return notes, "The Wolf Belt was constructed around two hundred years ago to commemorate a time when unity was needed to overcome the pressures of colonization." It concludes, "In reflection of the past two

³⁴⁶ Lillian Barton and Sue Herne, "The Tribe's Treasures: History Can Come Alive in Akwesasne," SRMT Kawennios Newsletter (August 2011), 12.

³⁴⁷ St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, "Wolf Belt Returning to Akwesasne: Sacred Belt has Long History," press release (September 14, 2010), pp. 1-2.

hundred years when the Wolf Belt was made a unity was forged so that we in this generation would realize that our ancestors were thinking of us, as the future generation."³⁴⁸ Further description of the belt explains that the *Ohkwaho Kaionmi Ne Akwesasne* (Akwesasne Wolf Belt) was a charter for the community, a covenant with its own people to declare the Akwesasne community as a defined territory and the people's commitment to protect the land that holds the community.³⁴⁹ The basis for the claim rests on the recorded history of a belt from Akwesasne's sister community that contains similar symbols. The description of the Kanestatek Belt contains the symbol of a wolf (or dog) on either end to guard the property established by the charter.³⁵⁰ The exhibit further explains that the *Ohkwaho Kaionmi Ne Akwesasne* "brings the people and the land together as one in an inextricable bond"³⁵¹ Prior to even viewing the belt, visitors are introduced to the importance of the belt to the community's connection to the land. The images of the day of its placement in the museum express to community members as well as outsiders that the belt belongs to the entire community and that its return was an important moment in Akwesasne history.

The panels and informational material on the Wolf Belt rest directly outside the door to the room designed specifically to provide it with a permanent home. The room itself is impressive; highly secure water and fire proofed, climate controlled, and low lighting to

³⁴⁸ "Wolf Belt is Home: A Summary of the Keynote speech on Akwesasne Wolf Belt Commemoration Day by Jake Swamp" Wolf Belt Exhibition Panel, The Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York (2012).

³⁴⁹ The Ohkwaho Kaionwi Ne Akwesasne (The Akwesasne Wolf Belt) Exhibition Panel, The Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York (2012).

³⁵⁰ Salli M. Kawennotakie Benedict, "Made in Akwesasne" in *Archaeology of the Iroquois: Selected Readings and Research Sources*, Jordon E. Kerber, ed., (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp. 422-441.

³⁵¹ The Ohkwaho Kaionwi Ne Akwesasne (The Akwesasne Wolf Belt) Exhibition Panel, The Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York (2012).

ensure sound preservation of the belt. To see the belt you must have a staff member with you, which provides the visitor with a better chance to ask questions and learn more about the belt. During my trip to see the belt, Sue Ellen Herne accompanied me and explained that there are a number of different stories concerning the belt. Some argue that the Akwesasronon created the belt when they first came to the region along the St. Lawrence River and that it was a charter much like what the exhibition material describes. Herne did note verbally that an alternative claims explain that the belt documents a treaty between the Akwesasne and the British. Overall, the interpretation includes multiple interpretations in an effort to include all viewpoints regarding the belt. According to Herne, since there is no certainty in the interpretation, they present all viewpoints.³⁵² As Herne suggests, this method is one way to present the meanings of the belt to different members of the community in a manner that is inclusive and uncontroversial.

While the museum presents a narrative that the true history of the belt is unknown, Darren Bonaparte suggests there is more to the story. Bonaparte is a former Chief of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, former museum director at the Akwesasne Museum, and an independent historian. Currently he works at the Ronathahonni Cultural Center, also known as the Traveling College, on the Canadian side of the reserve. Understanding the museum world, he noted that exhibitions often have to stick to basics when it comes to presentation. "The Wolf Belt thing on the other hand," Bonaparte expressed during his interview, "to me that was the most highly politicized thing in that museum, was how they approached the Wolf Belt. For instance, the Wolf Belt is presented as almost having no story no background behind it, just that it came from here. It was up in Albany for a century and it was

³⁵² Field Visit to the Akwesasne Museum by the author, April 10-14, 2012.

repatriated."³⁵³ He argued that they do know the history of the belt, and that a straight line of historical documentation proves that the belt is a treaty with the British as part of the Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship. Bonaparte insisted, "The belt itself is well documented. I've done a lot of the research myself. We know exactly what that belt is, where it came from, and what it implies. It's so rich with real historical knowledge."³⁵⁴ Bonaparte suggested that the interpretation at the museum was due to the involvement of the three tribal governments in its repatriation. The governments also provided the funds for the museum to build the special housing space. He argued, "To me they missed a golden opportunity to really delve into history with that belt, but they choose not to."³⁵⁵

There are many historical documents that point to the history of the belt. According to the records at the New York State Museum, Harriet Maxwell Converse purchased the belt from an unidentified member of the community at St. Regis on July 24, 1898. New York State Museum archaeologist, William Beauchamp's description of the belt noted that it was a treaty between the French and the Mohawks, with the two figures in the center representing the king and a Mohawk joining hands in friendship. Beauchamp noted that the belts date to the middle of the eighteenth century, a time when the Iroquois were "balancing between the English and the French."³⁵⁶ Prior to Harriet Converse selling the belt to the museum, census records from 1890 document that the belt was in the possession of Margaret Cook. General

³⁵³ Darren Bonaparte interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 11, 2012.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ William M. Beauchamp, "Wampum and Shell Articles used by the New York Indians," *Bulletin of the New York State Museum*, Vol. 8, No. 41 (February 1901), 427.

Henry B. Carrington compiled a special report on the census statistic among the Six Nations in 1892, which also recorded a number of oral traditions. His report noted:

"One wampum, now owned by Margaret Cook, the aged aunt of Running Deer, represents the treaty of George I with the Seven Nations. The king and head chief are represented with joined hands, while on each side is a dog, watchful of danger, and the emblem is supposed to be a pledge: 'We will live together or die together. We promise this as long as water runs, the skies do shine, and night brings rest.'"³⁵⁷

This is undeniably the description of the Akwesasne Wolf Belt. Similar to the description by Beauchamp, this account indicated that the belt was a treaty, though the discrepancy between the British or French proves curious. The New York State Museum claimed that expert analysis dates the belt to the mid or late eighteenth century based on the form and shape of the beads. The belt dates to the period of the French and Indian War, and all the evidence suggests that that the belt was a treaty that the Mohawks made with the British, breaking their alliance with the French. As a treaty, the belt took the Akwesasne into the Covenant Chain of Peace and Friendship the Iroquois Confederacy established with the British and gave the people of Akwesasne the rights to their land and the freedom to continuing trade beyond their borders.

As a treaty, the belt retains a deep relevance to contemporary life at Akwesasne, and holds the potential to be very influential in the current political environment. Bonaparte argued, "It's basically a border crossing treaty. It allows us to trade wherever we want and not be hindered by the crown. Well, that's a very powerful, political document that wampum belt, as all wampum belts are."³⁵⁸ With the reservation resting on both sides of the United

³⁵⁷ Henry B. Carrington, "The Six Nations of New York" Extra Census Bulletin, (Washington DC, 1892), 76. Accessible online <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890e3-03.pdf>.

³⁵⁸ Darren Bonaparte interview, April 11, 2012.

States and Canadian border, border crossing issues and conflicts frequently emerge, sometime resulting in a number of citizens protesting at the border bridge. It seems strange that the governments at Akwesasne would be hesitant to acknowledge the belt as a treaty to help defend the community's right to cross the border freely. Politics are complicated at Akwesasne. Sue Ellen Herne noted, "here we have two elective governments and a traditional government, plus splinter groups. [laughs] Whenever something comes up there can be a whole other group branch off from any one of the governments."³⁵⁹ Likewise, Bonaparte said, "Yeah everything is so political. Every aspect of life here at Akwesasne is brought up against politics all the time."³⁶⁰ It was likely that the recognition of the belt as a treaty proved too complicated and might potentially cause division in the community, whereas the claims that the belt was a community charter immediately offered a way to bring the entire community together. Bonaparte suggested that the version of the story that appeared in the museum was due to the involvement of the three governments, who often choose to overlook historical evidence to create a glorified version of the past. It is true that instead of presenting historical evidence that traces the provenance of the belt, the museum choose to present all the different theories behind its history. "I got a real problem with that." Bonaparte added, "I think, to convey to the outside world that we don't know our history is devastating."³⁶¹

The Wolf Belt presents a conundrum for a museum that serves as a negotiator between multiple voices in the community and responsibility of the institution to educate its

³⁵⁹ Sue Ellen Herne Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

³⁶⁰ Darren Bonaparte interview, April 11, 2012.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

users and present new ideas. The museum does not completely ignore the historical evidence, it just presents the idea that the belt was a treaty along with other stories as well. When visitors view the belt with a staff member they are verbal told of the various meanings of the belts, though the treaty version does not appear in any text in the museum. On the one hand, the museum strives to create a space free of controversy in an environment that is full of it, but on the other, it may be downplaying information that could provide the community with a better understanding of itself. The major question is if the influence of the community and the tribal governments affects the scholarship in a negative way or if it creates more compromise and balance than one may see at institutions not sharing authority with communities.

Issues of representation and memory of the past crept into museums as they developed from mausoleums of "stuff" with little description to cultural institutions packed with interpretation and context. Museums began to have to weigh public memory and sentiment over the past against what sound historical research suggested. Exhibits such as the *Enola Gay* at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in the mid-1990s, create firestorms of political controversy as these two concepts came to a head³⁶² Anticipating the way a museum community might react to sensitive topics, regardless of whether or not the museum brings in consultants from the community to gauge their opinions, is still a form of sharing authority since it allows the interpretation of academic research to be affected by how people feel about the information presents. Museums do not need to speak *with* the community to water-down their interpretation in anticipation of public reaction. However, sharing authority with communities in instances of controversy

³⁶² See Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

may actually serve an educational purpose, creating discussion, and finding fresh ideas to present research and possibly encourage healing in communities.

When asked to explain the importance of the museum to the community, Sue Ellen Herne responded:

"I think, to me, it's kind of like a bridge. Like I said earlier about appreciating ourselves. I think our own community in a lot of ways does appreciate who we are, you know, there is love. But I think there is also a good part of us that is still trying to heal from all the things that happened, and all the historical trauma, you know, beats a people down after a while. And so, I think it's an organization that can help in that healing. If we do things in the right way it can be, you know, a really positive place and a neutral place."³⁶³

Herne explained that the museum really strives to reach all members of the community as well as neighbors to the community. "We want to make it a place where no matter what your perspective is you come in and feel like, ok, this is my institution, my organization, my place. There's something about it that tells my story."³⁶⁴ Often the traditional arts classes are praised for bringing numerous members of the community together, but the exhibits also have provide a means to not only bring the community together, but also to learn to work through controversial topics. Bringing members of the community from different backgrounds to work collectively on a project fosters conversation between the museum and the community, as well as community members with each other.

The Lacrosse Exhibit

The community's youth are frequently participating in programs to develop exhibitions for the museum. The permanent exhibition in the museum, "We Are from Akwesasne," developed from the *Gathering Knowledge* program, included youth as junior

³⁶³ Sue Ellen Herne Interview, April 10, 2012.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

curators, and the practice continued with the development of the newer Lacrosse exhibit. The process of researching and directing that exhibit brought together Akwesasne youth with adult consultants, such as a long time lacrosse player and coach, a traditional sub chief with a museum studies background, the manager for the Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Team, a stick maker, and faith keeper, Darrell Thompson.³⁶⁵ Consulting with individuals who saw the game in very different ways allowed the youth to work through sometimes conflicting ideas to design an exhibit they felt was meaningful to the entire community. At first glance, it would not seem that controversy might arise in an exhibit on Lacrosse, but like anything that changed over time, conflicting opinions present themselves. The program intended to create the exhibit taught the youth how to work through this issue and shared authority with each other.

The idea to do a Lacrosse exhibit came from an adult member of the community, and the initial thought was to present something about the contemporary sport of Lacrosse and highlight teams and players such as the Iroquois Nationals, the only team playing under a Haudenosaunee flag. One of the goals of the project was to gather greater community involvement and support, and this initial concept for the exhibit brought in many donations and loans from community members, mostly lacrosse memorabilia.³⁶⁶ Throughout the planning process, the youth took it in a different direction, choosing to focus on the traditional game as a way to connect the game to teachings about life. This did not leave the

³⁶⁵ Institute of museum and Library Services Grant Performance Report, IMLS MN-02-09-0003-09, recipient, St. Regis Band of Mohawk Indians, (April 30, 2010), held in the Akwesasne Museum Files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

³⁶⁶ Institute of museum and Library Services Grant Performance Report, IMLS MN-02-09-0003-09, recipient, St. Regis Band of Mohawk Indians, (April 30, 2010), held in the Akwesasne Museum Files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York.

process devoid of potential controversy. "There are some things that are even controversial in it when you start looking at the traditional game," Sue Ellen Herne remarked, "And we knew that much, so that was even put into our proposal... I felt like it was a good thing to have built into the project something where they would have to think about and discuss something controversial and understand how to deal with that."³⁶⁷ Men only play the traditional game of Lacrosse; something Herne thought might upset some of the girls in the youth group that played lacrosse. Akwesasne is not as influenced by traditional practices as some other Haudenosaunee communities like Onondaga, and the idea that traditional practices considered it a bad thing for a girl to play proved challenging. The youth had to find a way to tackle the presentation of the importance of the traditional game to Mohawk life against contemporary practices.

Visiting Onondaga and a traditional stick maker, the youth explored the gendered aspect to the game a bit more. In Onondaga, the boys play lacrosse and the girls play soccer. Some of the children at Onondaga found it hard to believe that girls in Akwesasne played lacrosse. Even in the youth group from Akwesasne, there were some who came from more traditional backgrounds, and others that were female lacrosse players. After all the discussions about it, the conclusion reached by the group was that girls playing the modern version of the game with metal or plastic sticks did not harm the elements of the traditional game that is still played only by men and with wooden sticks. The traditional game restricts women from even touching the lacrosse stick. The belief was that the stick contains medicine that was only for the individual player, so they need to keep it to themselves, and

³⁶⁷ Sue Ellen Herne interview April 10, 2012.

particularly away from female energy.³⁶⁸ Included in this thought was the teaching that a man should never hit a woman, since the stick should not encounter a woman to retain its medicine. To emphasize that this does not make the game exclusionary, the faith keeper the children interviewed explained that women also belong to the medicine of the game. They have a game run for them to celebrate their power in the game, but that it was just a different role. Herne explained that by researching the topic from a range of adult consultants that explained the game in different ways, the youth were able to come up with a direction for the exhibition they felt would explain the importance of the traditional game in a way that was relevant to the present and provided everyone with a point for connection. Perhaps the greater success of the exhibit was its achievement teaching children how to communicate and share authority with each other when dealing with controversy, something they are bound to face throughout their lifetimes. Herne explained "It wasn't that one side had to convince the other that they were right or anything, but to be able to talk about it and come to a kind of understanding between one another that, you know, they didn't have to agree....But, at least to know how to talk about it (sic)."³⁶⁹ The program encouraged children to learn tools for collaboration.

After all the consultations and workshops, the youth focused on making the exhibit strictly on the traditional game, avoiding any emphasis on the contemporary game. In 2010, while working on the exhibit, the British government denied entry to the Iroquois Nationals the World Lacrosse Championships, claiming that the United Kingdom could not accept the

³⁶⁸ Rick Hill, "Lacrosse as Medicine" in the Lacrosse Exhibit Planning Folder, Akwesasne Museum Files, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York. Rick Hill worked as a consultant for the Lacrosse exhibit and provided a story about the medicine of lacrosse to the project team.

³⁶⁹ Sue Ellen Herne interview, April 10, 2012.

Haudenosaunee passports. The United Kingdom required that the players would also have to present a United States or Canadian passport for entry into the country. Ultimately, the team decided not to attend the championships arguing that they are a sovereign nation and other nations should accept their passports. This event seemed timely to the exhibit, and some adults involved in the planning process, including Sue Ellen Herne thought it would be a great addition to the interpretation. The youth decided against it, saying that it diverged too much from the traditional game and what they were trying to convey about the importance of the game to life in general. Based on the youth's direction, the traditional game served as the cultural symbol for the entire community find a connection, regardless of their personal background or beliefs. It also provided an opportunity for all involved to discuss a variety of different topics related to the game to come to those conclusions. "Its [Lacrosse] such a bigger thing than I ever understood," Herne explained, "It's like a bridge between the earth and sky world and there's just so much that we learn from working it out."³⁷⁰ The program allowed for a discussion of a variety of meaning to lacrosse, creating a high degree of power sharing as the co-curators and museum staff wove together multiple opinions.

The exhibition programs provide ways for the youth and community adults to collaborate with one another, but the final product demonstrates how well these practices in sharing authority was communicated to the audiences that did not participate in the programs. The information that ultimately made it into the exhibit reveals how well the museum was able to communicate the collaboration work which created it. The exhibit is visually striking, with connected archways resembling a longhouse. The space contains open walls and ceilings, but undeniably holds the look of a longhouse. Herne's son who

³⁷⁰ Sue Ellen Herne, interview, April 10, 2012.

participated in the exhibit planning program, is still upset that they did not put tree bark on it, but Herne explains, "It's not supposed to really be a longhouse like on earth, it's supposed to be in the skyworld, so it's supposed to be the concept of a longhouse."³⁷¹ The exhibit achieved this feeling by leaving the longhouse open to the sky.³⁷²

The first panel on the exhibit before entering the longhouse lets visitors know that youth from Akwesasne curated the exhibit. Additionally, it states, "The youth want their exhibit to remind everyone about the meaning and origin of the game...There are many stickball games from across our continent, but the Tewa'a:raton Iakwa'tswatha exhibit focused on our game, as we know it."³⁷³ The first panel also provides pronunciation for the Mohawk title of the exhibit, translating to "Lacrosse We Play It" and explains that the frame of the exhibit represents sky domes and longhouses. It also tells visitors "the philosophies in the exhibit text take us from a time of sky beings in sky world, before the earth was formed, to our present day, when the lessons from our culture can help players to lift the spirits of the people who they are playing for."³⁷⁴ The panels included in the frame of the longhouse include messages about the Creator's game, how the ancestors played lacrosse in the sky world, how it came to earth, and how one can honor the Creator and the people by playing it. Messages like, "It's not about you. It's about who you're playing for," remind those that play today to remember the significance of the game to the entire community. Little alcoves

³⁷¹ Sue Ellen Herne Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

³⁷² Field visit to the Akwesasne Museum by Meaghan Heisinger, Akwesasne Museum, Hogansburg, New York, April 11, 2012. Photographs of the exhibit are in the possession of the author.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

between each archway of the longhouse invite visitors to sit on benches, look at artwork depicting lacrosse, and contain smaller panels of information, including some on the medicine on lacrosse and an explanation of why traditionally women do not play. Towards the end of the exhibit, a panel gives the name for lacrosse from all the Six Nations and the meaning of each word to demonstrate how each Haudenosaunee nation describes the game. A small print out at the end gives a brief history of lacrosse, its diplomatic and medicine purposes, and stick making. Overall, the exhibit provides a visual experience, presenting key ideas and objects discussed in the planning meetings in a concise way, which encourages self-reflection.

The exhibit could be criticized for not diving more into the history of the game, its diplomatic consequences, or how it is played now, but it certainly accomplishes more for community building than they may have accomplished if they followed initial plans to create a sports memorabilia exhibit. In interviews with community members, most saw that value of the museum as providing a space for it to connect people to culture. At the insistence of community youth, this exhibit provided deeper meaning for the game still cherished in the community for those who may not have known all the traditional meaning. Community member and basketmaker, Sally Martin suggests, "It [the museum] plays a key role because not everybody is a member of the longhouse yet they still want to know about your culture and your history and you don't always have access to elders."³⁷⁵ The programming for the exhibit managed to connect community members to those resources and translate that into an exhibit that can reach those who did not participate in the exhibit design. Perhaps if the museum decided to delve into more historical research and expound the diplomatic history

³⁷⁵ Sally Martin interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

of the game, the exhibit could have been more academic but could make it harder for all visitors to make a connection to it. The decision by the youth to focus on the traditional game of lacrosse established lacrosse as a cultural symbol that all community members could access. In this case, the only effect political tensions had on the exhibit was in the educational tools provided to youth through collaborating with people of diverse opinions.

Arguments that sharing authority in museums creates unscholarly interpretations, a glorified version of the past, or too much conflict by attempting to include diverse voices does not hold up in the case of the lacrosse exhibit. The research put into the exhibit included many scholarly sources and information from players, faith keepers, and those tied closely to the game. The final design of the exhibit found a way to blend all the research together in a manner that was straightforward but thought provoking. It does not attempt to glorify the past; rather it presents the traditional roots of the game to emphasize the importance of the past to the present. Throughout the process of developing the exhibit, diverse parties contributed different points of view that the exhibit program discussed and worked out to create the final product. Based on Sue Ellen Herne's view of the success of the project, everyone involved learned something new about the game during his or her involvement in the project. Furthermore, the project demonstrated that using cultural symbols as tools for collaboration or as connections between an individual and an exhibit, works if the visitors are members of the community or outsiders to that culture. The lacrosse exhibit is simple yet complex, and the panel sayings like "Play to give thanks for your mind, body, and spirit," or "Be tough but fair," could resonate with any person from any culture that viewed the exhibit. The lacrosse exhibit provides all visitors, the community and its neighbors, a point of connection.

The lacrosse exhibit demonstrates that political tension should not prevent museums from sharing authority with their communities. It does demonstrate that collaborative efforts could help ease political tensions, as projects that bring together diverse opinions would help negotiate conflict and achieve consensus. That said, there are always politics involved in the workings of a museum, which can have an effect on its operational abilities, its access to funds, and its interpretation. The Akwesasne Museum is not immune to these influences and with the plans for a new museum as part of a tourism plan, the politics of interpretation could become more challenging as the museum attracts more visitors from outside the community.

Issues of Audience

Currently, the museum is a place primarily for the community, but also as a space to educate people outside the community about Akwesasne culture. Sue Ellen Herne says the primary audience is always the community, "because whether [we] trying to tell our story to other people or whether we are teaching people within our community, we have to think first about our community. You know, how are we presenting ourselves? So I always say it is our own community."³⁷⁶ It can serve both simultaneously. Assistant Director of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Environmental Division, Les Benedict does not visit the museum often, but does bring business associates from outside the community when they visit Akwesasne. Benedict works on the Black Ash Project with community member, Richard David, collecting Black Ash seeds and planting seedlings to ensure the protection of the trees used to make the baskets. Benedict often works with governmental officials or academics that benefit from visiting the museum. "Their understanding of the relationship between the

³⁷⁶ Sue Ellen Herne Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

resource and the products that are produced and the cultural ties is very limited," Benedict explained, "Their viewpoint is narrow through no fault of their own. Typically, their viewpoint is narrow just because they don't (sic) have the exposure that we would have...to the relationship between the tree and the basket and the people. So it's [the museum] a good tool for them to utilize."³⁷⁷ Likewise, other community members noted bringing guests from other Native communities or non-native neighbors to the museum as a place of introduction to the place and the people. The museum participates in a number of outreach endeavors, such as their traveling exhibits, and recognizes the importance of presenting Akwesasne history and culture in their own voice. With the expansion of the museum to come as part of tourism plan, it is uncertain how the influence of the larger outside audience may affect interpretation.

The discussion of constructing a new space for the museum occurred almost immediately since it moved to its current location. The space it occupies now is an upgrade from the building it first occupied in the 1970s, but there are still a number of challenges the structure creates for the care of collections and exhibitions. In more recent years, the discussion to relocate the museum gave rise to questions of representation and who the museum strives to serve, the people of Akwesasne, outside guests, or both. The politics of diverse audiences always influences decisions made in interpretation. Herne recalled when they met with the faith keeper for the Lacrosse exhibit, she asked if they could include all the information he told them in the exhibit or if it needed to remain only with the community members at the table. He responded that everything should be included to help people's understanding, but it brought up a point about audience and the amount the community

³⁷⁷ Les Benedict interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 12, 2012.

might be willing to share with outsiders. Likewise, there is a hesitancy to cater to outside audiences who come with preconceived notions based on stereotypes. "You want to be true to who I guess that is art of the challenge of it." Herne articulated, "You want to be true to who you are, true to your community, and you don't necessarily want to give people something that they come expecting."³⁷⁸ The challenge of negotiating various audiences' expectations with the desire of the museum to do collaborative work, and educated Akwesasronon as well as visitors about the past and culture is the challenge of the more recent plans for a new museum facility.

In 2009, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe published a tourism strategy for Akwesasne titled *Sharing the Spirit: An Akwesasne Cultural Tourism Strategy*. The plan included the a new facility for the museum, alongside a new welcome center, construction of an ECO-Resort, Art Park, and the beautification of Route 37 which is the main road through the reserve. The plan noted that the museum does not have adequate space for its collection, the age of the building creates structural problems and makes climate control difficult, and the museum lacks visibility to the public. In addition, the structure restricts the amount of people that can visit the museum at once. The new plan claimed it would address all these issues.

The plan calls for the one facility to house the museum, library, and the tribal archives, providing easy access for staff and researchers to all three repositories of cultural material. Sue Ellen Herne feels that the facilities should remain together or close to one another, but for them operate independently. "I'd like it to be connected to the archives because documentation is related," She noted, "but it still seems like its own thing."³⁷⁹ The

³⁷⁸ Sue Ellen Herne Interviewed by Meaghan Heisinger, Hogansburg, New York, April 10, 2012.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

plan does call for more staff that would allow for more specialization in each area of the institution. Additionally, the plan identified four key audiences for the museum: "The first audience will be the Akwesasne community. The second audience is local and surrounding communities. The third audience is students from high schools/colleges in the area. The fourth audience is the international and overseas tourists."³⁸⁰ While the first audience was the immediate community, the others all come from outside the community, and the plan suggested, "There is a broad base of themes that can be addressed by exhibits the new museum. May have already been touched upon by exhibits in the current museum...An expanded museum would allow for more in depth treatment of these and other themes."³⁸¹ It does not indicate what those themes are, but it suggests that there are aspects that the tourism plan desired the museum to address that it currently does not present. The plans also suggested developing an "authentic historical Mohawk longhouse Village" on the museum grounds to serve as an open air museum for visitors. The Village would include artisans in "accurate clothing" working on traditional arts that could then be sold in the museum gift shop.³⁸² This image of the direction the museum as part of a tourism plan clearly presents bringing people from outside of the community to Akwesasne as its main focus, understandably so since it is a tourism plan. The focal point of the current museum is its ability to collaborate with the community even as that community expands. The tourism plan provokes questions about who the museum would actively serve since the discussion

³⁸⁰ St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, *Sharing the Spirit: An Akwesasne Cultural Tourism Strategy* (Akwesasne: St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, October 2009), 15.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid.

does not include community involvement in the museum other than to list them as an audience to the museum and as the staff people that will run the institution.

The conversations for constructing a new museum are not new, and the plans and suggestions for what that institution should look like change as well. By 2011, the Institute of Museum and Library Services funded a grant to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and the Akwesasne Cultural Center to develop a plan for a new facility that would combine the library, museum, and archives into one building. The results of this plan are much clearer that the construction of the institution aimed to "serve the Akwesasne community."³⁸³ The plans developed out of a series of meetings, some included just the government councils, the museum board and staff, but others were open to the entire community. In the minutes from the community meeting held Monday, June 20, 2011, those present were asked to share what they thought was unique about the museum among the responses were, "Hands-on, interactive," "a gathering place," "community is represented," and "It changes as we change."³⁸⁴ Based on these statements, the community feels the museum is a place for them, where they feel they can share with the staff, and where they feel included.

The plans call for an educational facility rather than a showcase museum to attract visitors, expressing, "the organizers take this educational mandate for both Akwesasronon and the visiting public very seriously, as this is a way to encourage the support for the rights

³⁸³ Brian Porter, Maureen K. Robinson, Lisa J. Watt, and Heather Watkins, *Ionkwaio'te Senba Aioianerenbakié We are Working Toward Better Things to Come: A New Home for the Material Culture & Documents of the Akwesasne Mohawk People*, (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and Institute of Museum and Library Services, September 2011), 3.

³⁸⁴ Community Meeting Notes, Akwesasne Cultural Center, Monday June 20, 2011, in *Ionkwaio'te Senba Aioianerenbakié We are Working Toward Better Things to Come: A New Home for the Material Culture & Documents of the Akwesasne Mohawk People*, Appendices (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and Institute of Museum and Library Services, September 2011), 13.

if the Mohawk people in a peaceful and effective manner."³⁸⁵ The community members that attended the planning meeting mentioned they want the new museum to build pride and respect in order to build better relationships with other communities. They noted that authentic information mixed with welcoming displays and themes that demonstrate the culture is still thriving are necessary elements for the new museum. According to the meeting notes, not one person felt the museum should just be for the community alone, though they stressed the importance of community involvement in the institution.³⁸⁶

In its beginning stages, it was hard to tell what the new museum will look like or what it will achieve, however, the newest development process steers away from the earlier version geared completely at tourists. There was not one mention of an open air village in these plans, and instead the focus was on how to build an institution that works for and with the community. Perhaps that was because the museum had more influence in this latest model since they received the grant, rather than the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council. Though they are a partner in the plan's development, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council did not direct it as much in the 2011 plan as they did in the 2009 tourism plan. The politics of sharing authority moving forward in this endeavor will be a question of the ability of the museum, library, and archive, to collaborate with the three tribal Councils. Darren Bonaparte contends that, "the library and museum has a separate board but they seem to be locked in tied into the tribal council government. You know, their funding and payments process their

³⁸⁵ Brian Porter, Maureen K. Robinson, Lisa J. Watt, and Heather Watkins, *Ionkwaio'te Senba Aioianerenbakié We are Working Toward Better Things to Come: A New Home for the Material Culture & Documents of the Akwesasne Mohawk People*, (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and Institute of Museum and Library Services, September 2011), 5.

³⁸⁶ Community Meeting Notes, Akwesasne Cultural Center, Monday June 20, 2011, (September 2011), 13.

payments and their paychecks, so they're like a tribal organization."³⁸⁷ It is true that many grants the museum receives, such as those through the Institute for Museum and Library Services, go through the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, and that the tribal government supports the museum with funds that may contribute to staff paychecks, but it is unclear how much influence the governments really have on the content that ends up in interpretations. According to Sue Ellen Herne, she is left to handle the development of the exhibits and programming without much influence from the cultural center board or the council. The plans for the new museum indicated, "although the Cultural Center operates independently, the staff enjoys good working relationships with the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne which provided annual funding for operations in recognition of the important services the Cultural Center offers."³⁸⁸ There was obviously some cooperation between the museum and the various tribal governments, yet the museum staff contends that it does not affect the interpretation in the museum.

Sue Ellen Herne contends that the museum provides a space for people from different walks of life in the community to meet and connect over cultural elements that are important to everyone. In her perception as a staff person at the museum, Herne notes,

"I think what ends up happening is that people then start to understand the people that aren't just like them, because their story is here too and they are rubbing shoulders with people...Meeting people you didn't know because you run in different circles. So I think in a lot of ways it can help to mend fences and stuff like that where over the years sometimes people have fought over different things and it's a place

³⁸⁷ Darren Bonaparte interview, April 11, 2012.

³⁸⁸ Brian Porter, Maureen K. Robinson, Lisa J. Watt, and Heather Watkins, *Ionkwaio'te Senba Aioianerenbakie We are Working Toward Better Things to Come: A New Home for the Material Culture & Documents of the Akwesasne Mohawk People*, (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and Institute of Museum and Library Services, September 2011), 22.

where people can come together. And you don't have to even be thinking about that because we are all focusing on a certain thing that we all agree is a good thing."³⁸⁹

Concepts of shared authority unavoidably direct how a museum chooses to display and present information about highly political subjects and items, whether or not the museum is actively including the public in the discussion. The fact that museums would "water down" history or present the subject in its simplest form displays the institution's acknowledgement of public sentiment that may create backlash, which can occur even if collaboration with the community is avoided. All museums consider their audiences in this way to ensure visitation, and controversy is a high risk activity that either can discourage the public to visit or can draw audiences in to see it. Yet, in an effort to circumvent alienating audiences, controversy is a risk often avoided regardless of how much influence the community had in the exhibition's development.

The true depth of complexity and scholarship involved in exhibits happens behind the scenes. While some could criticize the museum as displaying "watered down" exhibits, the methods the museum utilizes to collaborate with community members creates a space that encourages dialog across differing points of view. In this way, the exhibits serve a greater function to the community through the programs that serve to create them, more so than they do once they are completed. The process of sharing authority in the museum created a living institution, informed by the viewpoints of community members that influence it, which continue to serve a function for the museum users that return repeatedly to exhibits that remind them of the process that created them. Identifying ways to reflect the development process within the finished product may be the next step to reaching a higher degree transparency and complicity within exhibits for those that did not participate in the

³⁸⁹ Sue Ellen Herne interview, April 10, 2012.

development process. Ultimately, the efforts by the museum to collaborate with a diverse public created ways for the museum to explore complicated issue and incorporate multiple voices into the museum's narrative.

The cultural symbols used in the museum, such as lacrosse, the Wolf Belt, and basketmaking all encouraged the community to contribute in some way to its use in the museum. These are all symbols that hold important meaning to the place and the people of the place, ensuring a point of connection that all community members could contribute something if they so wished. These efforts proved usefully in the incorporation of the community's children into the museum process. It provided a safe space to question and work through differing opinions within the community to reach a consensus. The exhibit programs at the museum also brought together community adults that served as consultants or educators to the projects, connecting different generations. The museum does not simply offer a space to continue traditional activities such as basketmaking, but its efforts to incorporate community voices in exhibits through programming that develops the displays takes shared authority to another level. In this act, the museum relinquishes a great deal of control to the community as they work through the evidence together to create displays that reach across divisions. This ability to make sense of complicated issues utilizing cultural symbols that create unity through a sense of place and community demonstrates the true power possible through the new shared authority.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The culture of an institution influences the ability of that institution to share authority with the communities it serves. The Akwesasne Museum demonstrates that power sharing with the public is achievable. The ability of tribal museums to include their community in the museum process has less to do with the narrow audience it serves, as Native communities such as the one at Akwesasne are quite diverse and extremely political. Successful collaboration efforts within museums occur around identified and particular cultural symbols that allow the community to gain a better sense of place and revisit what ties each member of the community together. All communities have cultural symbols no matter how diverse that community may become. Identifying and utilizing these symbols in a museum setting creates opportunities for community involvement and encourage community members to connect to their history, sense of place, and most importantly, each other. In this way, museums can become safe spaces for the negotiation of ideas that pull communities together rather than creating division. The institutional culture of the museum, informed by its history and mission, drives the ability of museums to collaborate with their community. Comparing the Akwesasne Museum with the National Museum of the American Indian, The New York State Museum, and the Iroquois Indian Museum demonstrates that the way an institution views its role in the community dictates how effectively it reaches and works with the public. It is not that sharing authority is unachievable in a museum space due to its inherent design; rather, it is the institution's willingness to see its relationship with its audience as reciprocal.

Museums, since the influence of the new social history and post-modernism, struggle to present important historical and cultural materials to diverse audiences. Engaging the

public in new and meaningful ways is crucial as museums confront an increasingly individualistic populous that have higher expectations of what the museum experience should do for them. Efforts to increase technology or create immersive experiences only go so far in developing a connection to history and culture that will continue to influence a person's life once they leave the museum. Suggestions that museums should be forums of discussion rather than mausoleums of knowledge suggest a shift in the meaning of "museum" in the modern world. *How* to make that change is a struggle for institutions relying heavily on the history of their institution as an authority to the community. The community is not only the museum's audience, but also its creators. Larger non-Native institutions often discuss these practices of the museum working "with" and "for" the community, not just "to" the community yet they never fully realize the potential of power sharing. Native nations across the continent are creating a new meaning of museums, one that is inclusive and living. The Akwesasne Museum is just one example of how Native institutions incorporate cultural symbols into their interpretation to connect people to the past, the place, and each other.

The unassuming split-level ranch style building which houses the Akwesasne Cultural Center Museum and Library does not resemble the western museum architecture, which traditionally displays its authority with large marble pillars, or big heavy doors. Not much about the museum is recognizable by western standards, other than its service as a repository, preserving and exhibiting material culture. The stories and narratives included in the museum are also different, sometimes combining the Mohawk language with English and telling the Haudenosaunee origin story through art. The museum contains a "paws on" room where members of the community can learn cultural arts such as basketmaking, connecting generations of Akwesasronon. Akwesasne displays many of the traits seen in

tribal museums across the nation and exhibits similar goals including preservation and access to cultural practice from community members, the ability to tell their own story and educate the non-Native mainstream about Akwesasne, and most importantly, create a place that reflects Akwesasne identity and self-determination. It accomplishes these goals through power-sharing and community-building efforts. Following a different agenda of the purpose of museums, Akwesasne, along with many other tribal museums, is “indigenizing” museum practice.

Akwesasne is not alone in its museum endeavors. In the last forty years, tribal museums have sprung up across the country. According to a report by George H.J. Abrams of the American Indian Museums Program of the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), two hundred and thirty-six tribal museums existed in the United States by 2004.³⁹⁰ The number today is surely greater, as the growth of tribal museums has mainly occurred in the last forty years. One can contribute the growth to a number of factors, and the Akwesasne Museum plays a unique role, being one of the earliest tribal museums in the country, long before the influence of casinos and NAGPRA which made museum economically feasible and necessary for many other communities. It is important to link the Akwesasne Museum to trends in the tribal museum world to reach a conclusion of how shared authority is transforming the museum.

The lack of collaboration with Native groups in mainstream cultural institutions in addition to the ways federal legislation shaped access to material culture disempowered Native communities and denied them access to important cultural symbols. The difficulty of many non-Native museums to share authority with Native communities led many to create

³⁹⁰ George H.J. Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 2004), 3.

their own institutions to engage their own communities and tell their own stories.

Individuals established a few tribal museums as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, Anthropologist Ira Jacknis observes, “As a type of museum, tribal museums are a particularly recent development. There was a Cherokee tribal museum as early as 1828, but most existing tribal museums have been founded since the 1960s.”³⁹¹

Abrams survey of seventy-five different tribal museums revealed that this date may be even later and that the modern tribal museum movement did not begin until the 1970s when the Economic Development Administration (EDA) provided federally recognized tribes with funding to build motels and museums to increase tourism.³⁹² The Akwesasne Museum fits nicely into the framework of this greater tribal museum movement, established in 1971 as a library that in 1972 began its museum collection. It is clear that the Akwesasne Museum did not develop in a vacuum, and that a number of factors led to its creation alongside numerous others appearing relatively at the same moment in history.

A greater examination of the development of tribal museums across the country reveals a number of complex social, cultural, and political incentives that led to the creation of museums by American Indian communities nation-wide. It is no coincidence that the movement begins in the era of self-determination amongst social and political activism and the struggle of tribes to determine what “self-determination” meant for them. Tribal museums appear as a topic of discussion across the country when tribes address issues of self-sufficient economic enterprises, revitalization of culture within communities and

³⁹¹ Ira Jacknis, “A New Thing?: The National Museum of the American Indian in Historical and Institutional Perspective,” in *National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 31.

³⁹² Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (2004), 4.

educating non-Native tourists and visitors about cultural practices in their own voice. However, museums are not a traditional institution for the preservation of culture in Indigenous groups and due to this, the growing number of tribal museums since then begs the question: why museums? The adaptation of an institution which had been used for hundreds of years to exploit, take away, and deny access to Native culture, demonstrates many tribal communities ambitions to create a new meaning for the museum to make it serve their cultural needs, as are many other institutions under self-determination.

Traditional Euro-American designs for museums shaped by western ideas about culture are vastly different from many Native communities' beliefs, making tribal museums different from the standard museum experience. The movement to create these museums came out of the social movements among Native groups during this same time such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). Museums were one method for Native nations to create a place of authority and self-determination over their own cultural past where it did not exist elsewhere. The way each Nation approaches the construction of a museum is different, though care of cultural material through either western museum practices or methods influenced by tradition rank most important to tribal museums³⁹³ Similar to practices in other aspects of Native communities, museums became locations for the negotiation of culture through the adaptation of aspect of western tradition and the retention of important facets of tradition. The blending of two worldviews in tribal museums encouraged new methods of caring for cultural symbols returned through repatriation or donated by community members.

³⁹³ Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming Culture* (2006), 39.

Tribal museums that add repatriated cultural material to their collections have yet another dilemma to address. As philosophy professor, Hilde Hein suggests that as Native communities advocate the need to control their own representation, it calls for them to be aware of what that requires. She articulates:

The ‘collected,’ in whose place the museum has traditionally spoken, face the dilemma that by speaking they now assume responsibility for the objectified identity that they are alleged to represent. And should they refuse to speak, they give tacit consent to the passivity of their represented condition and acquiesce to its enforced silence.³⁹⁴

Native communities that take repatriated objects and place them within their own cultural institutions for display must address the predicament that they may be continuing to objectify their own traditions by placing them outside of their cultural purpose. Conversely, if they do not take that object and try to change its perceived meaning, than they are merely allowing the objectification to continue. This is a paradox that many tribal museums are trying to address by changing the perceived meaning of the museum and transforming into something different than traditional in western influenced institutions. Developing methods to utilize cultural symbols beyond keeping them in display cases allows them to remain living objects in the community that work to create connections between the museum, the people, and the place.

For instance, in 1996 an article in the *Tribal College* suggested that while not all repatriated objects will be placed in museums, “many tribes need safe places to display and interpret a wide array of cultural items.” Due to this, “Experts predict in the next five years

³⁹⁴ Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2000), 43.

the number of *tribal museums* will double.”³⁹⁵ As critics feel that Native communities are not equipped properly to preserve materials, this article suggests that developing or improving museum facilities and providing greater training to staff remains a top priority for some groups that want to see items repatriated. The Akwesasne Museum exemplifies that even communities with established institutions are focused on insuring standard climate control and security standards are met for repatriated cultural material, such as the Wolf Belt, or for their entire collection, as described in the plans for the new museum. According to George H.J. Abrams’ survey of tribal museums, developing a repository is the second most important function of these institutions based on museum responses, with one museum even mentioning the legal requirements of repatriation as a factor. The survey found the most important function of tribal museums according to respondents, is cultural preservation and revitalization for the community, which parallels the goals of creating a repository for the repatriation of materials.³⁹⁶ According the results of the survey, the collection and care of cultural materials and symbols are the top two reasons for creating a museum, demonstrating the importance of those materials to the communities.

Museum staff at tribal institutions generally come from within the community, thus creating an interesting dynamic where staff walk a line between “community member” and “museum professional,” a duality which conflicts the mainstream museum narrative where museum professionals often exclude community voice. One of the great benefits of the introduction of community voices to museums is that they bring with them new questions

³⁹⁵ Marjane Ambler, “Cultural Property Rights: What’s Next after NAGPRA?” *Tribal College* (Vol. VII, Iss. 2, Oct. 31, 1996), 8.

³⁹⁶ Abrams, *Tribal Museums in America* (2004), 7.

and perspectives to the past.³⁹⁷ The culture of the institution directly influences the degree to which the museum responds to community voices. As demonstrated at the Akwesasne Museum, tribal museums view their role as negotiators between community and museum, changing the role of the museum in the community.

Native communities that wish to have a museum must constantly wrestle with the fact that often this type of institution contradicts their own way of preserving and handing down cultural practices. Mary Lawlor is an associate professor of American studies and English at Muhlenberg College. In describing the Shoshone of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, Lawlor indicates, “the idea of a ‘cultural center,’ located in a particular place and displaying objects for spectator’s curiosity, is in many ways antithetical to traditional Shoshone methods for maintaining history and culture.” However, she suggests “But this museum-archive makes available to non-Indians, in ways that are familiar to them, the elements of Shoshone culture and history that the tribe is willing to display in public.”³⁹⁸ In this sense, the museum is a space for self-determination where the community decides which cultural elements to display and which to withhold. The influence of traditional methods of power-sharing encouraged the Akwesasne Museum to collaborate with the community regarding the care, use, and interpretation of important cultural symbols, such as the basketmaking, encouraging the living use of material culture.

The reasons why Native communities want to enter into the museum enterprise even after years of traditional museums oppressing and misrepresenting indigenous people is curious, particularly when considering that museum practices often went against traditional

³⁹⁷ Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2000), 43.

³⁹⁸ Mary Lawlor, *Public Native America* (2006), 103.

indigenous ways of maintaining culture. Anthropologist, Joy Hendry questioned numerous communities to understand the answers to these questions and the response of many Native communities proved surprising. Hendry explained, “An exhibit in a museum is a good way to tell a story, and they wanted to make sure that theirs was told properly, and in their own words.”³⁹⁹ Many communities sought the authority to control the representation of their culture and sacred objects, and felt that it was better if they presented them rather than allow insensitive non-Native institutions maintain control. Addressing the issue of repatriation, Hendry explained that opening their own institutions gave many communities advantage over other museums to have material objects returned to the tribe.⁴⁰⁰

Cultural preservation and the repatriation of cultural material appear to be the main objective of many museums, emphasizing the importance of cultural symbols to the telling of history. It is also clear that these objectives are not strictly for community members, as many tribal museums express an interest in correcting past wrongs by writing the history taught in schools and educating the mainstream public about their communities. Abrams’ survey noted that not far behind cultural preservation and creating repositories, educating non-tribal members was many museums’ third objective. The Akwesasne Museum achieves the goal of educating others by first educating and engaging its own community, linking the two communities. Examining how tribal museums communicate with outside audiences presents clues to how it uses cultural symbols in the institutions to connect community members to a sense of place and encourage community participation in the museum.

³⁹⁹ Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming Culture*, (2006), 49.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

Collaborations with their immediate community often help tribal museum reach a more general audience in new and interesting ways. Examples of this come from tribal museums all over the country. An article on the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum, the first museum operated by an Indigenous tribe in Idaho in 1984, noted its important relationship between the museum and the community. The museum manager, Rosemary Devinney, articulated that by creating a space for tribal members' artwork, the museum contained living artifacts that help the community financial as well as culturally. Additionally, the museum provided a way for the community to communicate with non-Native visitors.⁴⁰¹ Museum board member, Emma G. Baldwin noted a main reason she wanted to work with museum was her hope that the museum would "help bridge the communication gap between Indian and white people through a better understanding of Indian culture and traditions."⁴⁰² At the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum, contemporary artwork serves as an important cultural symbol that encourages the museum professionals to collaborate with the community, which then translates into a narrative of a living community identity presented to outsiders through the museum.

Likewise, a 1995 report on the Hoo-hoogam Ki museum in Arizona noted that the museum "highlighted the Pima and Maricopa cultures, lifestyles and art to the outside world for the last few years," and that "the museum is the one place community members and visitors can learn more about the community's varied history and its diverse cultures through

⁴⁰¹ Michael Price Cosgrove, "Much Can be Learned at Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Museum," *Sho-Ban News* Vol. 25 Iss. 4 (Fort Hill, Idaho: Jan 24, 2001), 3.

⁴⁰² "Board Envisions Museum Bridging Communication Gaps" *Sho-Ban News*, Vol. VIII, Iss. CXXXVI (Fort Hill, Idaho, Dec. 12, 1984), 3.

various exhibits and informational displays.”⁴⁰³ In the southeast, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians already had a museum for community purposes, but in 1976 decided to build a “modern museum” for the purpose of adding to the attractions for tourists to learn about the inhabitants of the area prior to Cherokee occupation, as well as during Cherokee prehistory, removal, and the contemporary Eastern Cherokee.”⁴⁰⁴ The Akwesasne Museum in the Northeast also expresses a strong desire to teach outsiders of the community about life at Akwesasne by creating traveling exhibits that bring the museums interpretation of Mohawk history to non-Native institutions.⁴⁰⁵ The ability to juggle multiple communities simultaneously proves more successful in many tribal museums, such as Akwesasne, due to its ability to proactively work within its immediate community through collaboration efforts.

The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut may be the best example of a tribal museum that communicates to a large non-Native audience while simultaneously claiming to serve its immediate community. As one of the largest tribal museums in the country, the community built the 300,000-square-foot facility with funds from the nearby Foxwoods Casino. Opened in 1998 the museum seeks to inform the world that Pequot culture is still alive. Anthropologist John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, noted that the community of Pequots in Mashantucket “represent[s] a disparate and diasporic group. To reestablish or newly establish traditions they have conducted research into their past,

⁴⁰³ “Hoo-Hooham Ki Museum” *Au-Authm Action News* (April 30, 1995), 5. (Accessed ProQuest Ethnic NewsWatch, October 23, 2009).

⁴⁰⁴ Christina Taylor Beard-Moose, *Public Indians, Private Cherokees: Tourism and Tradition on Tribal Grounds* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009), 104.

⁴⁰⁵ Akwesasne Museum, *Gathering Knowledge Project Narrative*, (2005), 1.

employing archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians."⁴⁰⁶ Due to a long history of community separation, the museum is different from other tribal museums in its lack of a large collection of material objects. While other tribes may be utilizing their museums for repatriation purposes or to house their own cultural artifacts, the Pequots have little physical cultural material to present, and nearly everything in the museum is a recreation to represent Pequot culture of the past and present.

Theresa Hayward Bell, the founding director of the museum does not see the lack of a collection as a drawback. "Most people think that museums are about artifacts," Bell noted "There's more to being Native and understanding Native people than having an artifact. It's what's in your heart, the way you were raised. It's what you're about."⁴⁰⁷ The result is a museum that recreates the meaning of Pequot identity to visitor by way of walk-through dioramas, interactive high-tech-programs, and photographic tribal portraits that present the Pequot past and present. The Disney-like effect of the museum ultimately places the visitor in a position to *experience* the museum rather than just view cultural material. The lack of objects in the museum does not diminish the importance of cultural symbols or sense of place to create connections within the museum. The displays create images of cultural symbols, such as the farmhouse that bisects the museum wall, allowing guests to wander outside by traveling through the house. The farmhouse is a key visual symbol of the exhibit Life on the Reservation, and provides a space to connect the past with the present and the sense of place with the museum. As a nation rebuilding its sense of community and identity,

⁴⁰⁶ John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 77.

⁴⁰⁷ Bell as quoted in Michael Stoll, "Indian Museum Boom: Tribes Use New Riches to Recast History" in *The Christian Science Monitor*, (August 11, 1998), 3.

the museum serves as a space for the community to negotiate through important cultural symbols the connection between the past and present.⁴⁰⁸

While some tribal museums developed with the general public in mind, it is important to stress that for many the primary function of the museum is to preserve, protect, and pass on traditional culture to tribal community members. Ecomuseums (neighborhood museums focusing on one community), such as those found at Ak-Chin, Arizona or Zuni, New Mexico highlight community services and community involvement in the museum process. In these cases, the museum is an institution that can help solidify a tribal identity and a pride in one's community.

After spending a year in Zuni, Gwyneira Isaac discovered that the ecomuseum developed there served as a device to include the entire community as curators and would encourage the younger generation to gain knowledge of cultural traditions suppressed due to fear that outsiders would gain sacred information. Isaac notes, "Using the museum would make it acceptable to explore issues of identity—a personal activity not previously engaged with in a public arena in Zuni."⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, through the creation of the museum and developing ways to speak to community members and the public, Isaac suggested that the Zuni have created a "third cross-cultural narrative genre..., they have the origin narratives, the ancestral stories, and now public history developed from the negotiation of esoteric and

⁴⁰⁸ For a deep exploration of how the museum presents Pequot culture through artistic representations and recreations of the past, see: John J. Bodinger de Uriarte, *Casino and Museum: Representing Mashantucket Pequot Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007). For a description of the farmhouse in the exhibit Life on the Reservation see pages 147-153.

⁴⁰⁹ Gwyneira Isaac, *Mediating Knowledges: Origins of a Zuni Tribal Museum* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 111.

familial knowledge.”⁴¹⁰ The creation of the museum enabled the community to connect tribal knowledge through generations while also developing new ways to understand the meaning of that knowledge for individual identity. The A:Shiwi A:Wan Museum and Heritage Center (Zuni Museum) is not a place for outsiders, rather a means for the community to ensure the continuation of its culture without outside infringement.

The Ak-Chin Him-Dak Eco-museum is also an example of an institution developed with community interests as its primary objective. Though tourists are welcome, they are not the main objective of the museum, and the staff self-produces exhibits geared toward a community audience. Recent exhibitions have presented quilts made by community members, information on the agricultural efforts of the community, as well as an exhibit room dedicated to tribal members serving in the United States Military.⁴¹¹ Highlighting the museum's interests in serving its community, the project to build a museum developed from the desire to have cultural material returned to Ak-Chin. A number of archaeological projects in the Maricopa area during the 1970s uncovered material held by the federal government. Though they returned the human remains to the Ak-Chin, the government made the case that repatriation of the rest of the material required a place with sufficient storage to hold it. This initiated the need for a museum, and after visiting numerous other tribally-owned facilities, the community decided an ecomuseum was the best type of institution to serve their needs.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ Isaac, *Mediating Knowledges*, (2007), 163.

⁴¹¹ Information based on visits by the author, September 22, 2007; February 12, 2008; August 9, 2009.

⁴¹² Karen Coody Cooper, *Spirited Encounters: American Indians Protest Museum Policies and Practices* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 160.

Whether the museum focuses on reaching tribal members or outsiders to the community, the physical location or *place* of the museum is undeniably important to the experience of those visiting the institution. Place is particularly significant for what kind of audience tribal museums are able to reach and to the comfort level of those visitors. In discussing the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C., historian and art critic, Mario A. Caro observes the importance of place for both the NMAI and tribal museums. While he sees the NMAI developing into a new space that diverse groups could identify with as “home,” he notes the effects of the placement of tribal museums on both Native and non-Native visitors. Caro argues that the location of tribal museums on reservations creates effects the way non-tribal members approach the museum as they negotiate “Native space, a space often clearly defined as sovereign.”⁴¹³ The experience of visiting a tribal museum for a visitor not a part of the community thus begins once they enter the reservation and must negotiate their position as an outsider or foreigner. This is a different experience for many non-Native museum visitors who are accustomed to American museums highlighting their inclusion in the national history.

The power of the place the museum occupies has a dramatically on the mindset museum visitors have before they even enter the museum, which dictates how they will approach the material within the museum. The museum’s place within the reservation, while marginalizing the outsider, seeks to provide a welcoming space for those within the community who may otherwise not be comfortable visiting museums. At Akwesasne, outside visitors to the museum must first enter the St. Regis Reservation, where handmade

⁴¹³ Mario A. Caro, “The National Museum of the American Indian and the Siting of Identity,” in *National Museum of the American Indian: Critical Conversations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 439.

signs along the road remind them they have entered “Mohawk Country,” indicating that they are in an unfamiliar place. Conversely, members of the community, the museum is in a place that is very comfortable and possibly more welcoming than other mainstream museum. Mario A. Caro also addresses that “the reservation is the site, real or imagined, to which many Native communities have an essential relationship.”⁴¹⁴ He argues that even those misplaced from traditional homelands have a strong connection to their present land, developing a relationship with the place as their home.

Maintaining a museum or cultural center on tribal lands serves not only as a space of tribal authority over the telling of history, but also creates an environment to connect tribal members to a sense of community identity. Museums on tribal lands offer comfortable environments where tribal members feel they are accepted and even a part of the museum, something that may not occur in more intimidating non-Native institutions. For example, the Akwesasne Museum invited children from the community to help create *Gathering Knowledge* and the Lacrosse exhibitions allowing them to fully participate in the museum process and feel like the museum was their own.⁴¹⁵

The increase in the number of tribal museums and the influence of NAGPRA has created an environment of new museum practices that are addressing the issues of mainstream institutions neglecting Native voice in their interpretation. Collaboration between tribal museums and non-Native institutions increased in recent years, endeavors which force a shared authority between institutions and cultures. These efforts are ways that tribes fulfill a desire to teach the mainstream culture in venues that non-Natives are more

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 437.

⁴¹⁵ Akwesasne Museum, *Gathering Knowledge Project Narrative*, (2005), 1.

likely to visit, while still maintaining the ability to inform the interpretation and narrative. Herne suggests that tribal museums have actually set the stage for large museums to change their practices, and this is one example of a tribal museum influencing and shaping the presentations in a mainstream state museum.⁴¹⁶ It is a role reversal, where the tribal museums are influencing changes in larger mainstream venues.

For example, in 2007 simultaneous displays of artwork by contemporary American Indian artists occurred at the Albuquerque Museum and the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. The exhibit, entitled “Unlimited Boundaries: Dichotomy of Place in Contemporary Native American Art” was created to “provoke consideration of how these individuals view themselves as artists and as Native Americans in the 21st Century.”⁴¹⁷ Similarly, Sue Ellen Herne of the Akwesasne Museum served as a co-curator with Katsitsionni Fox (Bear Clan from Akwesasne) on an exhibit for Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence University. The exhibit entitled *Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: An Exhibition of Hotinonshonni Contemporary Art*, and highlighted contemporary art as an extension of traditional Haudenosaunee values.⁴¹⁸ Collaboration of this nature demonstrates that mainstream institutions are taking tribal museums seriously, and more importantly, the contemporary artwork displayed demonstrates to non-Native visitors to the exhibits that Native cultures are still alive and thriving.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Anonymous, “City and Tribal Museums Collaborate on a Multi Tribal Exhibition of Contemporary Artwork,” *Native American Times*, (Vol. 13, Iss. 7, 2007), 1.

⁴¹⁸ North Country Public Radio, “Following in the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: An Exhibition of Hotinonshonni Contemporary Art,” <http://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/haudenosaunee/haudenosaunee.php#> (Accessed October 3, 2008) The website includes an online tour of the museum with photographs and an audio interview with Sue Ellen Herne and Katsitsionni Fox.

Collaboration efforts and tribal museums on their own are undeniable exclamations of American Indian communities' ability and right to present their own perceptions of their history and contemporary societies. The power of tribal museums recognized within American Indian communities, recently begun gained attention from the greater museum profession. In April 2009, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki, the museum of the Seminole tribe in Florida, became the first tribally-owned museum in the United States to be fully accredited and recognized by the American Association of Museums (AAM). The process to reach this status took the museum five years to achieve.⁴¹⁹ AAM standards are difficult for many tribal museums to achieve, not always due to lack of resources or education. Many tribal museums recreating the meaning of "museum" do not fit AAM standards that require a trained and educated staff and a focus on building a collection.⁴²⁰ In order to acquire accreditation, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki museum needed to align itself with the established methods of the western tradition of museums. Established in 1993, the "primary purpose of the institution remains to preserve and interpret the culture, language and customs of the Florida Seminoles."⁴²¹ A first class institution, the museum boasts the "world's best collection of southeastern beaded shoulder bags," alongside a number of interpretive ventures such as nature trails, an "outdoor amphitheater for shows and storytelling" and a "living village" where the craft of making traditional arts is demonstrated to guests.

⁴¹⁹ Chris C Jenkins, "Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Becomes First Tribally-Owned, Accredited Museum" *Seminole Tribune*, (Vol. 30, Iss. 4, Apr 24, 2009.), 1.

⁴²⁰ American Association of Museums, *Accreditation Program Standards: Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum*, (AAM: Effective January 1, 2005), electronic edition on-line at <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/upload/Characteristics%20of%20an%20Accreditable%20Museum%201-1-05.pdf>.

⁴²¹ Jenkins, *Seminole Tribune*, (2009), 2.

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki museum's mission statement: "The Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum collects, preserves, protects and interprets Seminole culture and history – inspiring and appreciation of the Seminole people,"⁴²² suggests that the museum is viewed as a means to have a voice in telling their own historic narrative to non-Native visitors. With this function in mind, accreditation from the AAM is even more significant since it signals a shift in the perceptions of museum professionals as to who has the authority to tell such stories and which narratives are important. In one sense, the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki is the first example of tribal museums taken seriously by the greater museum profession, making this an achievement for not only the Seminoles, but also Native groups across the country. Alternatively, the shaping of the museum to fit AAM standards rather than AAM standards shifting to be more inclusive of the types of institutions Native communities are developing highlights professional resistance to changing the meaning of "museum."

The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki museum's accreditation from the AAM creates further questions as tribal museums conform to the standards and ideals of the academic community. The drive of the museum to seek accreditation raises questions over the balance between tribal sovereignty and the want or need to have federal, state, or national organizational standards and regulation applied to tribal institutions. Tribal museums do not reap the benefits of being an accredited museum if they do not shape their museums to the policies and ideals of the mainstream. These are standards that often have held the academic or "expert" opinions in higher esteem than Indian communities' beliefs, which creates a question over whether

⁴²² Seminole Tribe of Florida, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum: A Place to Learn. A Place to Remember, "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.ahtahthiki.com/ahtahthiki-museum/faq.html> (Accessed on November 20, 2009).

the museum in then serving an indigenous purpose, or is a tribal extension of western imposed standards. Ultimately, since tribal museums do not have to seek accreditation, tribal sovereignty is not in danger but the force of the academic world is predominant.

For tribal museums, the praise from the larger museum profession appears to be on the rise. Recently the Oklahoma Museums Association presented the Comanche National Museum and Cultural Center with an award, to “recognize outstanding achievement by museums and individuals throughout the state during the past year. Award categories include exhibitions, promotional piece, publication, Web site, newsletters, conservation projects, and education programs.”⁴²³ The museum won the award in the category of “promotional piece” for its sixty second television commercial to promote its exhibit “Celebrating Josephine Wapp.” Recognition of the success of tribal museums across the country speaks to the greater influence Native nations are gaining in the museum world. As their approaches to collaboration and community engagement continue to create an Indigenization of the museum, institution steeped in a western tradition will eventually see the potential for shared authority in museums.

It is likely that the number of tribal museums in the United States will only continue to grow. Lisa J. Watt, Seneca, noted, “Museums are very desirable to tribes. Despite the great cultural diversity in this country, you can boil it down to two types of tribes: those that have tribal museums and those that want tribal museums.”⁴²⁴ As the number of tribal museums continues to increase, the definition of what constitutes a museum continues to adapt fit the

⁴²³ Staff Reports, “Comanche National Museum to get OMA Award,” *Indian Country Today*, (Sept. 8, 2009), 1) Electronic copy online <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/archive/57701847.html> (Accessed on November 10, 2009).

⁴²⁴ Lisa J. Watt, quoted in Jack McNeel, “Museums of the Nations Blossom Across the Country,” *Indian Country Today*, Vol. 25, Iss. 9 (Aug. 10, 2005), C1.

needs of individual tribes. No matter the size or budget of the museum, the objective appears to be the same; to create a safe repository for material culture, educate non-tribal members about the community and its history, and, most importantly, to maintain a place of self-determination and cultural revival where tribes can recount their history in their own words and evoke a sense of pride and identity from community members. In order to achieve these objectives, tribal museums blend the objectives of traditional western museums with new methods to get the community involved in the institution and make it a place that is welcoming yet protective of its culture.

The Akwesasne Museum is a great example of these objectives happening in tribal museums across the nation. The museum space is both a repository and cultural center that encourages community members to participate in the creation of exhibits, traditional arts and crafts classes and connects tribal members to multiple meanings of Akwesasne identity. The museum, developing its own path while still being a part of the greater tribal museum movement connects visitors with a sense of place that is important to the community and for the understanding of non-tribal visitors. Like so many others, the Akwesasne Museum are indigenizing the museum and transforming a traditionally western and often exploitative space into a place of collaboration with the environment, the community, and the region's culture.

The museum field continues to struggle for direction as society evolves and changes its demands on educational and cultural institutions. The concept of shared authority encouraged discussion about the role the public plays in museum interpretation and displays. While many museum professionals continue to struggle with the capability of museums to share power of the past with the public, many tribal museums are reinventing the meaning of museum as a means to engage their communities. After a long history of exclusion to

cultural material and representation in museums, museums owned and operated by Native nations are finding new methods to protect and preserve important cultural material. Ideas within tribal institutions mirror the western museum model, but differ from a traditional museum due to worldviews focused on cooperation, power sharing, and balance. Even as museums like the National Museum of the American Indian, the New York State Museum, and the Iroquois Indian Museum attempt partnerships with communities, they are not fully successful due to a lack of understanding of the place the museum occupies and how that reflects the history and culture of the immediate community. Combined with an institutional culture that dictates museum staff as the experts, a disconnection from place and important cultural symbols to which all community members could find a connection; prohibit the museums from reaching a deeper level of shared authority. The ability of fully listening and negotiating multiple viewpoints in a way that develops lifelong users of the museums is not achievable if the museum is unwilling to redefine its role in the community and change its practices.

Communication, negotiation, and collaboration are all very powerful tools for creating a better sense of history, culture, place, and most importantly, community. In the past, museums served as spaces of civil pride and exploring "others." In the developing global world, communities are becoming more diverse while the populous increasingly focuses on the individual rather than the community. Museums retain the ability to connect communities together through collaboration. Shared authority is possible in the museum space and can be very successful at creating strong relationships between the museum and the community. The ability to share authority in a meaningful way with the public is achievable in every institution that has an identifiable audience. Superficially including community voices in museum exhibits or programming is not equivalent to bringing the

community on board in their creation. Other tribal institutions employ similar tools to those applied at Akwesasne for engaging audiences, namely using cultural symbols as tangible links to culture. Tribal institutions also foster a keen understanding of the environment surrounding their museums. The "new" shared authority realized at the Akwesasne Museum and in tribal museums across the United States present a model all museums can follow to create an environment that community members want to revisit throughout their lives. This model makes the museum a living place that enhances the life of an individual while it reinforces a sense of community. Museums have always been places of power. The direction of museums is to recognize their power to affect their communities in positive ways as an active participant rather than remaining a space that simply provides information or tells a narrative. Shared authority, as demonstrated at the Akwesasne Museum, makes museums matter in a changing world and can provide a safe space to negotiate the challenges of the future.

AFTERWORD

The Akwesasne Mohawks have a legend that tells of the last snowstorm of the winter which occurred “a long time ago, when there were just Indians living on Turtle Island (now known as the North American Continent).”⁴²⁵ In the story, a Mohawk man is very happy that spring seemed to have arrived; the sun was shining and the snow was melting. He was so happy that he took a walk through his fields to the woods. The story goes:

He came upon a great pine tree with low hanging branches, some almost touching the ground. He walked toward the pine tree and there in the shade of the low branches he saw a mound of snow. The snow reminded him of the past cold, cold winter. The Indian became very angry, so angry that he cut a red willow switch and whipped the mound of snow. He said, “There, that’s for the hard time you gave me this past winter.” He threw the switch away and then heard a quivering old voice from the mound of snow. It sounded like the voice of an old person. The voice said, “You are going to be very sorry for what you did. I am going to freeze you to death. I will give you only enough time to reach your cabin.”

The Indian became very frightened and ran to his cabin. He broke off branches and also picked up fallen branches, as many as he could carry back to his cabin. Upon entering his cabin he started a fire in the fireplace. As he built the fire it started to snow and it became very cold. The weather got colder and colder, soon frost began to form on the inside walls of the cabin. The only place he could keep warm was very close to the fire. So he stayed near it and kept putting wood in.⁴²⁶

The man kept steady watch over the fire for two days before he remembered the bear grease he had in a large barrel. Placing a bit of the grease into the fire made the flames grow very hot and the heat began to melt away the frost from the cabin. On the third day, the man saw a cloud in the coldest corner of the room.

From the cloud came a voice and then he saw an old man with a body half melted away. The old man said “I am AH Tho, the Spirit of Winter. You are lucky that you had bear grease, it was the only thing that saved you. From this time forth, I’ll make you a promise. Just when you think that Spring is here and Winter is over, don’t you

⁴²⁵ *The Last Snowstorm (A Mohawk Legend)*, 1984, Akwesasne Museum oral history files, Akwesasne Library, Hogansburg, New York.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

believe it, 'cause I'll always come back once more. This is because of what you did to me and got away with this time. Tell your people to remember what I said and to always take their coats when they go out anywhere. Remember I will always come back one more time." The Spirit of Winter went away and Spring came.⁴²⁷

The story comes with a reminder to embrace the winter for all its strong points, such as the assistance snow provides in tracking deer and the fun one can have on a hill with a toboggan. Residing in an environment where winter lasts for a good portion of the year, this story of Winter Spirit is important to remind the community how to embrace and work with their natural surroundings. At Akwesasne, winter greatly influences the seasonal flow of life, culture and reaffirms a connection to community identity. The story also characterizes the adaptability of the community and a sense of compromise out of conflict that seems to permeate all aspects of Akwesasne. Aside from a reminder of how to deal with the environment, the story is also a warning to not belittle or treat others badly (in this case the Winter Spirit) but that it is also acceptable to defend oneself. It is a lesson to compromise, adapt, and listen to the needs of others. As a traditional story, it speaks to the worldview of the people at Akwesasne that understand the necessity in finding balance in all things. It presents the ideas that form the base of shared authority.

While sharing authority presents itself as a new concept to a museum world embedded in a western tradition, it is an old idea present in many cultures throughout the world. As museums face a future filled with new technology that focuses on the individual, the utilization of power sharing can provide a sense of personal attachment to the museum while simultaneously building a stronger community.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

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