

Conversation Framed—The Center for Native American and Indigenous Research: A Jeffersonian Legacy¹

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Like the founding of the American Philosophical Society itself, as Linda Greenhouse and Gary Nash so eloquently characterized it in the opening session,² the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research (CNAIR) did not spring to life fully formed at its nominal origin in 2014. It has a prehistory and an ongoing history that intersects with other APS initiatives extending back to the Jeffersonian legacy we celebrate in the APS's 275th anniversary year. Understanding Native Americans was only part of what Franklin, Jefferson, and Washington meant by “useful knowledge,” which they doubtless saw more in relation to the “self-improvement” implicit in “philosophical” meetings and to the ever-present necessity of negotiating terms of colonial expansion—somewhere between hypocrisy and noblesse oblige. As the longest-standing member of CNAIR's founding generation, I have been asked to speak about what it means to the APS. I hope to persuade you, especially those whose interests and expertise lie far from contemporary Indigenous issues, that something important has been happening here—of which the APS membership can justly be proud.

I suggest that the American Philosophical Society is the *only* institution that could have done these things and the only one capable of sustaining them as a legacy to American society and public discourse. There are at least four reasons for this uniqueness:

1. Autonomy: Neither Congress nor Board constrain our imaginations. We are free to dream and take risks to realize our dreams.
2. Continuity: CNAIR builds on a hoary legacy of engagement with Native Americans.

1 Read 28 April 2018 as part of the *Center for Native American and Indigenous Research: A Jefferson Legacy* symposium. The symposium included a talk by Anton Treuer (published in this issue), as well as an introduction by APS Librarian Patrick Spero and a talk by Isaiah Lorado Wilner.

2 Linda Greenhouse's and Gary B. Nash's talks were published in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Volume 163, Number 1, in March 2019.

3. Gravitas: The APS is the oldest and most respected of the New World's intellectual institutions, its history inseparable from that of the nation itself. APS Librarian Patrick Spero has reminded us of the weightiness of the Library's Native American collections.
4. Endowment: The APS has sufficient resources to commit to an expensive and long-term commitment. When the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Challenge Grant is fully funded, CNAIR will become a permanent part of the core budget of the APS.

Now to the story: it's important to remember that none of us knew at the onset where disparate initiatives would lead—how or if they would all come together. There have been and still are many moving parts not always in synchrony. Although I can speak only from my own standpoint and experience, I have had a ringside seat for a long time. I provide a snapshot of where we are now, even though “now” is a moving and ever-changing target.

For me, CNAIR began in 2008 as a gleam in the eye of Matt Bokovoy, then-incoming Native American Studies editor at the University of Nebraska Press. He approached me about his vision for a documentary edition of the Franz Boas Papers (that is, the professional correspondence). I am highly susceptible to gleams in colleagues' eyes. Nonetheless, after a decade immersed in the life and work of Edward Sapir, I was wary of the pitfalls of biography, given the complexity of any major figure and the absolute impossibility of closure. For good reason, there is no adequate biography of Boas's entire career, especially after 1906 when he moved rapidly away from anthropology as then narrowly understood. But, I thought, the gleam in my own eye building in strength, perhaps a team of scholars and Indigenous users of the collections, especially descendants of Boas's original collaborators, might pool their expertise and insights. Former APS Librarian Marty Levitt's eyes lit up with a now increasingly familiar gleam when Matt and I approached him. We began to plot, to amalgamate and expand existing initiatives that had evolved piecemeal but were nonetheless part of APS tradition.

The Phillips Fund for Native American and Indigenous Research “in ethnohistory, linguistics and the history of studies of Native American languages in the continental United States and Canada,” on which I have served since 1994, and as its chair since 2006, has supported multiple Indigenous scholars, many of them students, in response to the CNAIR mandate of capacity-building in and for Native American communities.

Two successive Mellon Foundation grants supported digitizing Native American materials held by the APS, including linguistic, musical, and photographic resources of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) collection of Indigenous manuscripts that were in Boas's personal possession at the time of his death.

The Mellon grants underwrote the establishment of a Native American Advisory Board in 2011, on which I have served on behalf of the APS. The Board was co-chaired by two Indigenous lawyers: Bob Miller, our first Indigenous elected member and a tribal judge, and Denise Zuni. The other tribal representatives had proposed or already had ongoing research projects with the APS: Tim Powell, CNAIR's first Director, had already worked with the Eastern Band of the Cherokees, Penobscot, Tuscarora, and Leech Lake Ojibwe. Indigenous members all agreed to serve as a more general board to set an institutional mandate beyond their own collaborations with the APS. After multiple drafts and much soul-searching, we formulated a set of Protocols to be binding on publication and dissemination of Indigenous materials in the Library's collections.

These Protocols serve as a guideline for Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in particular cases; they morphed into CNAIR by 2014. CNAIR now has seven MoUs under Curator of Native American Materials Brian Carpenter's capable oversight, each reflecting unique community needs and circumstances. Researchers are responsible for demonstrating their established ties to descendant communities, and the communities are responsible for ensuring the proper treatment of culturally sensitive materials. Digital knowledge sharing returns the documents to the descendants of their producers in their places of origin, deeply embedded in local land and community.

Another strand of the story follows the origins of the Franz Boas Documentary Edition from those gleams in the eyes of Matt on behalf of the University of Nebraska Press, Marty for the APS, and myself with strong ties to both. We added a Tribal Council partner of the Kwakwaka'wakw (Boas's Kwakiutl) and went in search of funding.

In 2010 I hosted a workshop at the University of Western Ontario inviting potential collaborators to assess the feasibility of a Boas documentary edition. We decided that among us, with other colleagues added to the editorial team, we could proceed with some confidence. The conference results appeared as the first volume of the Franz Boas Papers.³

3 Regna Darnell, Michelle Hamilton, Robert L. A. Hancock, and Joshua Smith, *The Franz Boas Papers, Volume 1: Franz Boas as Public Intellectual—Theory, Ethnography, Activism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

Applications began for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Grant. In 2012, Marty Levitt found a donor to support digitizing the Boas professional correspondence, a project completed at the end of 2014. Early in 2013, SSHRC awarded us \$2.5 million (Can.) over a seven-year period. That funding is nearing its financial end, but the work of various volume editors and APS staff collaborators will continue for many years.

As the Franz Boas Papers (FBP) team got down to its work, governed by an Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC), the work increasingly merged with that of the emergent CNAIR. Our community liaison, currently Dawn Nicolson of our tribal council partner, is on Vancouver Island and channels community feedback, as does Angie Bain of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs on behalf of interior, mostly Salishan, BC, communities. In the summer of 2014, CNAIR and FBP team members were invited by knowledge keeper, IAC member, and research collaborator Ryan Nicolson to “visit the land,” a crucial first step to building relationship with the Kwakwaka’wakw of Kingcome Inlet, at the northern end of Vancouver Island. We returned to nearby Alert Bay, BC, a year later for the potlatch at which Mikael Willie took the chiefly title of Ole Si’widi and again in 2016 when Ryan hosted a potlatch presenting his research, much of it based on Boas/Hunt ethnography at the APS, thereby restoring to contemporary knowledge clan names and genealogies that intersected across the 17 Kwakwaka’wakw communities and witnessing his own title of Gwi’molas. At both potlatches the APS presented the chiefs with copies of unpublished materials recorded by George Hunt with Franz Boas, and the FBP team offered each new chief a one-year research assistant position to be chosen by them, thus building community research capacity.

Brian Carpenter carries on the work of Tim Powell, which continues to snowball as new communities seek partnerships. The APS sponsored a conference on Indigenous endangered languages, now wending its way to publication. Alyssa Mt. Pleasant (Hodenosaunee) now serves as Program Director for the recently established Mellon Native American Scholars Initiative (NASI) supporting Indigenous fellows at undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral levels. We are increasingly finding mechanisms and funding to bring community people whose credentials are cultural rather than academic to the APS to give them access to materials. Brian has developed a much-needed revised Indigenous Subject Guide that is available online and introduced a more extended search capacity. We are now in the process of merging the FBP Omeka-based metatagging system developed in response to Indigenous collaborators’ demand for a search engine including place names, clan names,

titles, and prerogatives, and including alternative spellings. The FBP team has also digitized and tagged Boas documents from other repositories, especially the American Museum of Natural History and the Canadian Museum of History. The APS will inherit our database as the project winds down. Finally, there has been an explosion of related Boas scholarship, much of it published by the University of Nebraska Press, in *Histories of Anthropology Annual*, which I edit. I note particularly Rainer Hatoum's elegant comparison of Boas's fieldnotes on the 1894 potlatch he sponsored for George Hunt's son David to its appearance in print as the generic Kwakiutl potlatch under Boas's authorship, and Nicole Green's framing of her own collaborations with the Nuuchah Nulth (formerly known as Nootka) in terms of multiple generations of anthropologists working in a community collaborative format. Both of these young scholars have received APS grants in their pasts and rely on documents from the Boas and ACLS collections.

In sum, CNAIR has situated the American Philosophical Society at the cutting edge of Native American and Indigenous research, and there certainly will be more to come. The paper that follows will illustrate some of the directions in which we are moving.