

Smithsonian Runner

A Newsletter for Native Americans
From the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Cheyenne ancestors interred in Concho, Okla.

"Naevahoo' ohtseme" in Cheyenne means "We are going back home." It is a relatively simple phrase that embodied the complex and emotional paradox of sorrow and joy for the Cheyenne people on the morning of July 10 at the Concho, Okla., Cemetery. The occasion was the burial of the remains of 18 Cheyenne people after more than 125 years in the collections of the Army Medical Museum and the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

The return and interment of the Cheyenne remains is an example of the implementation of the repatriation policy of the Natural History Museum and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

Since 1991, following the 1989 National Museum of the American Indian Act and the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the Repatriation Office of the Museum of Natural History has fulfilled several repatriation requests.

This summer, in addition to the Cheyenne repatriation, the remains of 12 individuals were returned to the Chugach and Eyak people of Prince William Sound, Thomas Killion, director of the Repatriation Office, said. A set of funer-



A set of Cheyenne human remains is wrapped in blankets and packed with cedar chips in cedar boxes by three leaders of the Southern Cheyenne, from left, Moses Starr Jr., Nathan Hart and Lucien Twins, in preparation for the journey to Oklahoma. (Photo by Laurie Minor-Penland)

ary objects was returned to the Hui Malama I Na Kupuna 'O Hawaii Nei organization of Hawaii. Recommendations for the return of human remains to the Warm Springs and Yakima people are being finalized, and Arapaho and Central Sioux (Yankton, Yanktonai and Assiniboine) cases are nearing completion.

The status of the Pawnee case reported in the September-October 1992 Smithsonian Runner has broadened to a larger number of individuals and is now being documented.

At the Concho Cemetery, five sets of remains collected by the U.S. Army after the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 in

Colorado and 13 sets collected by the Army in other circumstances were interred following their return on July 1 to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma.

Edward P. Wilson, chairman of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and Lawrence Hart, a traditional Cheyenne chief from Clinton, Okla., led a delegation of 15 governmental and traditional leaders during the recent ceremony at the Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. As the assembled guests watched, the remains were wrapped with reverence in shawls, blan-

(See 'Cheyenne,' Page 6.)

Featured inside...

- 2 Dialogue: Elizabeth Sackler
- 2 NMAI Update
- 4 Smithsonian interns
- 7 Around the Smithsonian

Dialogue

This column was written by Elizabeth Sackler, president and founder of the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation in New York City. Sackler is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In the spring of 1991, Sotheby's was preparing for their annual "Fine American Indian Art" auction. The sale of 293 lots included five "masks," as the auction house incorrectly identified them. The Hopi and Navajo, from whence three of the five originated, asked Sotheby's to remove the two Kachinas and a Yeibichai from the block—their sale was offensive and sacrilegious. The requests were ignored.

On May 21, I purchased them at that auction and honored those requests. My motivation was simple: the Ahöla, Köyemsi and the Yeibichai are not art and should not be sold as such. They belong to living cultures, very spiritual cultures, and are considered to be life spirits integral to cultural identity and a way of life.

Indigenous peoples blessed with an extraordinary aesthetic produced multitudes of artifacts, clothing and moccasins, blankets and ceramic storage pots

as beautiful as their sacred rattles, pipes and fans, all elegant and enduring as are great works of "art."

Artistic genius of Western Civilization's "Fine Arts" is often awe-inspiring in its transcendence; beautiful and awe-inspiring Indian religious materials have been confused with art and treated as a commodity in the market place. Absent has been the demand that art dealers and auction houses distinguish that which is art or artifact from that which is religious ritual object of living cultures. Collectors and museums, now enlightened, must press for these delineations.

Native peoples have survived, but their rights of religious freedoms, customs, ritual objects and history—in short, Native American culture—are still under siege and forced to battle federal law, politicians, logging and mining interests, and the art market. The cultural destruction of indigenous peoples must be curbed. A dialogue, overdue from the beginning, has started.

The native elders' support of intercultural teaching, the rising consciousness of non-Indians and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, which sprang from human-rights concerns, raise important questions: Who owns what? What can be bought and sold? What is "sacred"? How should repatriation to indigenous peoples

be handled? The ethical and moral issues surrounding these questions should be addressed by collectors and dealers, as well as museums.

American Indians are not yet recognized as the experts of their own culture. This is a time to acknowledge who knows what, about what. Impact on public education is sure to follow.

The abundance of thanks to my purchase to return the two Kachinas and Yeibichai that May was extraordinary and inspirational. The American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation, an intercultural partnership committed to assist in the return of religious materials to American Indians, emerged as a conduit and educational organization. We are available to collectors and museums, tribes and individuals.

The repatriation of American Indian sacred material physically and spiritually reunites that which has been severed from its source. Repatriation is reculturation.

Postscript: The Köyemsi returned to Hopi July 4, 1991, has been dancing again in ceremonies since March 1992.

Editor's note: The views expressed in "Dialogue" columns do not necessarily represent the views of the Smithsonian Institution or of the National Museum of the American Indian.

NMAI Update

The repatriation of nine Kwakiutl potlatch objects from the National Museum of the American Indian was marked by a celebration on July 17 at the Mungo Martin Big House, Thunderbird Park, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Mary Jane Lenz, associate curator at the NMAI Research Branch in the Bronx, N.Y., attended the event, which she described as "splendid" and "truly joyous."

In September 1992, the NMAI board of trustees approved the return based upon identification by photograph of the objects, which were confiscated in 1921 by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police from a potlatch being held at Village Island, B.C.

The return was based on the NMAI repatriation policy, which provides for the

return of communally owned materials "acquired by or transferred to the museum illegally" or under circumstances that render the museum's claim to them invalid.

The request for the return of 35 objects purchased by George Gustav Heye (who founded the predecessor to the NMAI) was made in a January 1985 letter to the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation from Bill Cranmer, chairman of the board of directors of the U'Mista Cultural Centre, Alert Bay, B.C., and Rod Naknakim, director of the Kwakiutl Museum and Cultural Center, Quathiasi Cove, B.C. Cranmer's father, Dan, was holding the potlatch when the RCMP confiscated the objects.

(See 'NMAI Update,' Page 3.)

Smithsonian Runner

Published for Native Americans by the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Public Affairs, Arts and Industries Building, Room 2410 MRC 421, Washington, D.C. 20560. Printed on recycled paper.

Articles may be reprinted from Runner without charge but should credit Smithsonian Runner and the article's author.

Linda St. Thomas Acting Director
Kathryn Lindeman Associate
Director for Publications
Dan Agent Editor
Peggy Langrall Staff Writer
Holly Hammett Editorial Assistant