



Frances Densmore, working with the Bureau of American Ethnology in the field of Indian music, is shown with Mountain Chief, a Blackfoot, who is listening to a song and interpreting it in sign language. Her recordings are now in the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress. The scene was photographed by Harris and Ewing in front of the original Smithsonian building in March 1916. (Negative NAA 55,300)

Photographs from the Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives.

## THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN INDIAN RESEARCH AT THE SMITHSONIAN

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The study of North American Indians was one of the original interests of the Smithsonian Institution. In fact, the first scientific report it published dealt with Indian remains in the Midwest. Such contributions by the Institution to the study of man were early and vital, and had much to do with the development of anthropology in America. Today, because of the unique material in its anthropology archives, the Smithsonian continues to be a prime source of information for scholars and others seeking knowledge of the original Americans.

In 1847, one year after the Institution was founded, the Smithsonian Board of Regents declared its interest in "ethnological researches, particularly with reference to the different races of men in North America, also explorations and accurate surveys of the mounds and other remains of the ancient people of our country". The Regents also proposed the publication of a series of scientific reports. The first accepted for publication was "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley", by E. G. Squier and E. H. Davis. It was published in 1848 in the *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the Institution's principal role in anthropology was as the recipient of specimens from various parts of the world, as well as archeological, linguistic, and ethnological material from North America. One of the early contributors to the anthropological collections was George Gibbs, whose interest in Indian languages led him to begin the collection of Indian vocabularies. Another was James Swan, who collected Northwest Coast Indian artifacts. Charles Bird King's paintings of Indian delegates to Washington became the nucleus of the National Indian Portrait Gallery.

The Smithsonian's interest in Indian studies was given impetus in the 1870s partly as a result of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876. For this, several government agencies received appropriations to gather material illustrating native American cultures. The Smithsonian, with its large collection of Indian artifacts, was put in charge of preparing the exhibits. When the exhibition ended, all of the collections were sent to the Institution. Frank H. Cushing, Charles Rau, and Edward Foreman, who prepared and installed the American Indian collections at the exhibition, became the first permanent anthropological staff of the United States National Museum at the Smithsonian.

The principal focus of American Indian research at the Institution resulted from the efforts of Major John Wesley Powell. Major Powell, a one-armed Civil War veteran, was a dynamic man—a teacher, administrator, geologist, and ethnologist, and probably one of the most influential scientists in Washington in the 1870s. He organized and participated in the first scientific expedition down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon in 1871 and was a founder of the United States Geological Survey. He was also a founding member of the National Geographic Society and of the Anthropological Society of Washington. Among his many dreams was the desire to "organize anthropologic research in America." By doing this he hoped to elevate the study of Indian cultures from the realm of curiosity and to correct numerous errors of earlier publications.

It was Major Powell, more than any other individual, who prodded Congress into creating a federal bureau to study the rapidly changing Indian cultures. In the early 1870s Congress had made



appropriations for an expansion of western explorations under the direction of the Smithsonian. The resulting United States Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region included provisions for Indian studies. It was put under the direction of Major Powell, then fresh from his successful Colorado River expedition. In July 1874 when the Survey was transferred to the Department of Interior, anthropological research was given greater emphasis. The Smithsonian supported this by transferring its ethnological and linguistic manuscripts to the Survey. This was in keeping with the Institution's policy of not duplicating the work another government agency could do. In March 1879 Congress established an appropriation for a separate bureau to study the history, languages, and cultures of North American Indians. The Bureau of Ethnology, later renamed the Bureau of American Ethnology, was made a branch of the Smithsonian, and Major Powell became its first director. Thereafter, until 1965 when the Bureau was absorbed into the Smithsonian Office of Anthropology, an



Frank H. Cushing, who was adopted into the Macaw clan at Zuni Pueblo, and given the name of Tenatsali or Medicine Flower. He became a prominent member of the tribe, and at its request wore Zuni clothing. Photographed by John K. Hillers at Zuni Pueblo about 1880. (Negative BAE Portraits 22)

Indian Images: Photographs of North American Indians 1847-1928, an exhibition of photographs from the National Anthropological Archives is on display in the Rotunda of the National Museum of Natural History. These photographs have been selected from the collection of approximately 50,000 black and white negatives and prints relating to the more than 350 Indian tribes of North America. This collection includes portraits of individuals, as well as pictures illustrating clothing, house types, ceremonies, and crafts such as weaving, basketry, and pottery-making. Prints may be ordered through the Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, Washington, D.C. 20560. A catalog of the exhibition may be ordered through the Smithsonian Institution Museum Shops, Washington, D.C.

annual appropriation was made by Congress for its research.

Although the permanent staff of the Bureau and the Museum was small, the personnel possessed the skills of ethnologists, linguists, and archeologists. In addition, a number of other persons working in various parts of the country collaborated with the Bureau and the Museum and were encouraged to collect data. As a result, vocabularies, texts, grammatical notes, maps, transcriptions of native music, native drawings and paintings, photographs, and items of material culture, such as baskets, clothing, and weapons, were deposited at the Smithsonian. These contributions came from government officials, army personnel, doctors, teachers, and missionaries, as well as from staff members. The ethnological and linguistic manuscripts on Indians became the concern of the Bureau, and the artifacts were catalogued, maintained, and displayed by the National Museum.

The vast accumulation of data pertaining to the young science of anthropology created a need for specialization. This was reflected in the formation of a new division within the Smithsonian, the Division of Physical Anthropology, formed in 1903 and headed by Aleš Hrdlička. Hrdlička was interested in the racial history and unity of the American Indian, especially in the study of early man in America. This led him to carry out extensive research in Alaska. Also, under his direction, measurements, casts, and busts were made of many Indian delegates who visited Washington.

It was essential that an archives be established to take custody of this collection of unique data. The material resulting from the early field work of professional and amateur anthropologists was collected and catalogued, at first on an informal basis. Some of the work of contributors such as Major Powell, Otis T. Mason (famous for his studies of basketry), William H. Holmes (whose interests were art and technology), Francis La Flesche (an Omaha Indian), J. N. B. Hewitt (who was part Iroquois), Hrdlička, and others had been published in the Bureau Bulletins and Annual Reports and other Smithsonian and National Museum publications. However, significant portions of the data remained unpublished. It was the responsibility of the Bureau archives to maintain the collection over the years and to make data available to qualified researchers. In addition, the staff of the archives has handled numerous inquiries from the public about Indian life and personalities.

The archives are now designated the Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives. The collection is being expanded to reflect the entire range of interests included in the science of anthropology, and now includes photographs and manuscripts from Africa, South America, Oceania and the Near and Far East relating to ethnology, linguistics, archeology, and physical anthropology. However, the material relating to North American Indians remains the most important segment of the collection, and continues to provide an unequalled store of knowledge for scholars and others studying the first Americans.