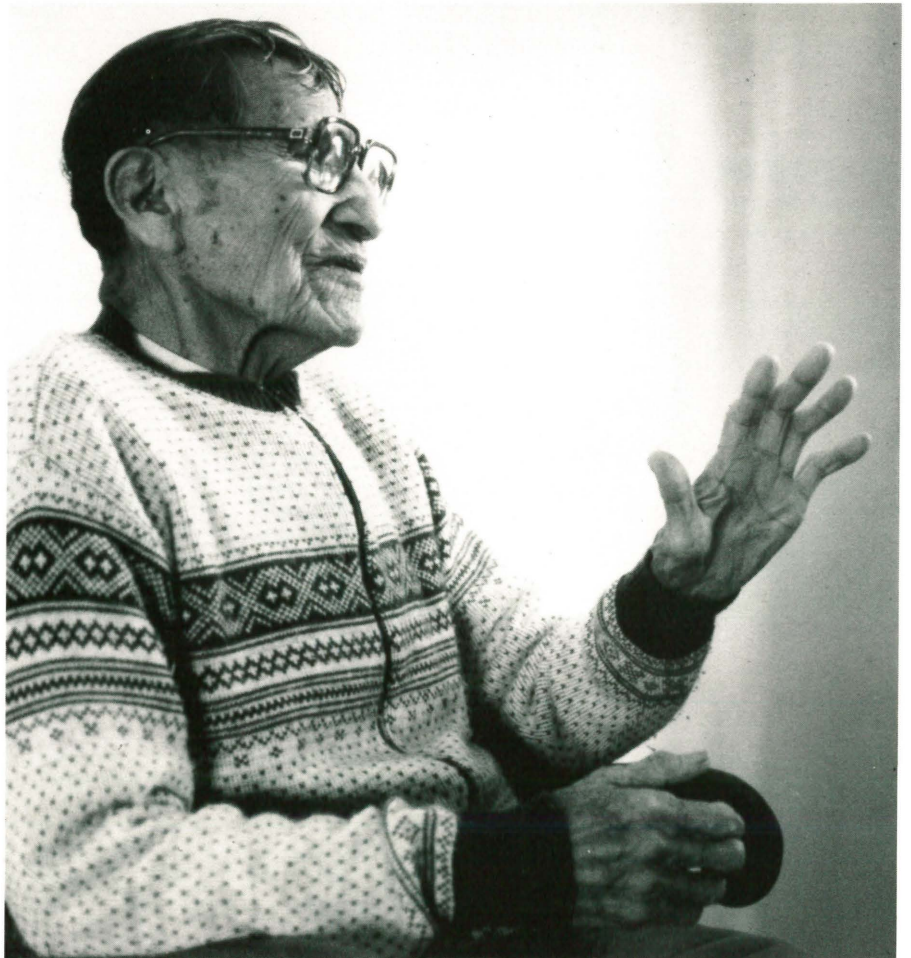


American Indian Tribal Museums: Conserving Tradition with New Cultural Institutions by George Abrams

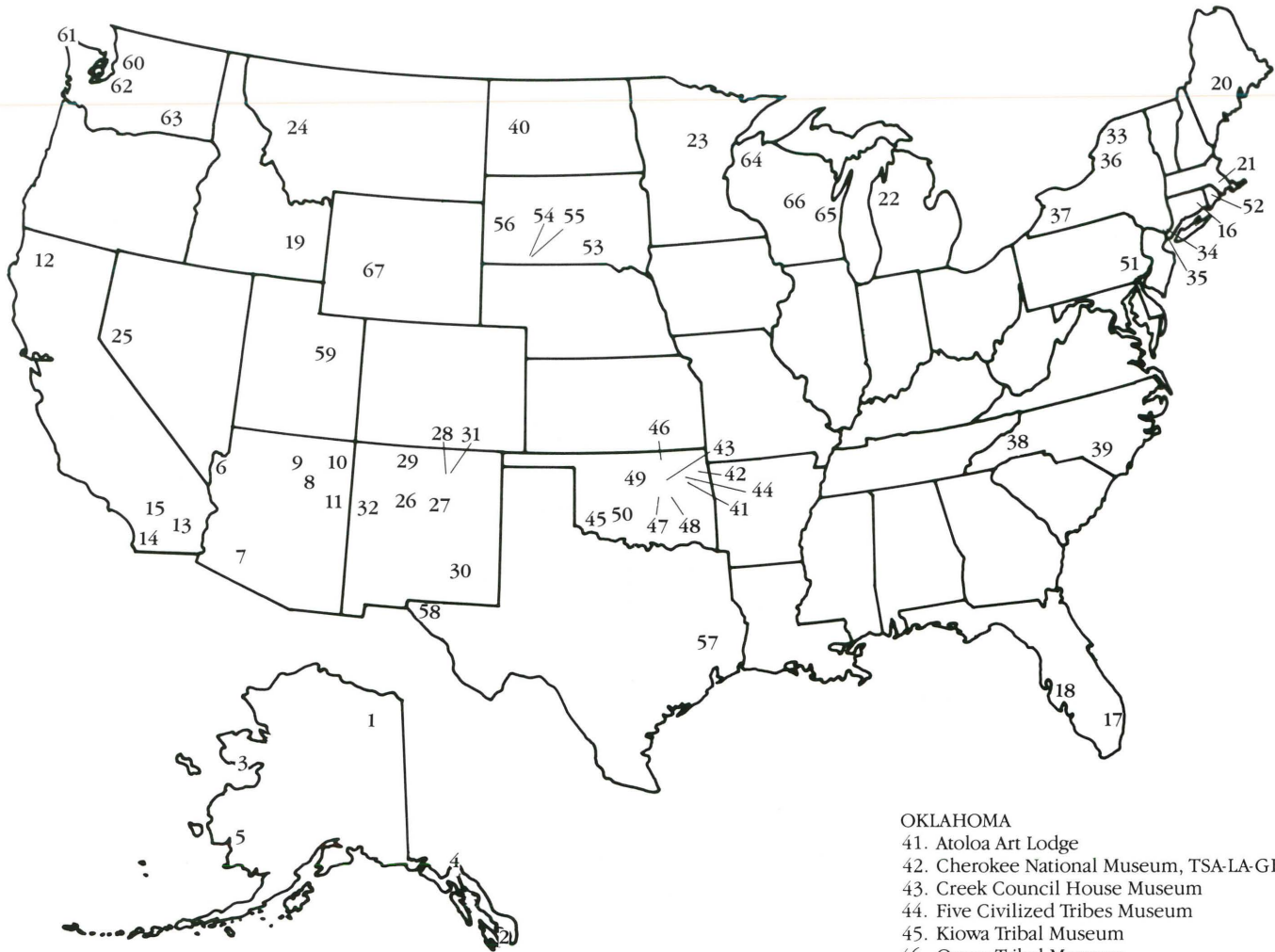
George Abrams is a member of the Seneca Nation of Indians and chairman of the North American Indian Museums Association. He is also director of the Seneca-Iroquois National Museum on the Allegany Indian Reservation in Salamanca, New York.

During the 1960s and 1970s a new type of institution began to appear in Indian communities throughout North America — the tribal museum. Several phenomena contributed to its creation, including the Civil Rights movement and the subsequent reemergence of racial pride among America's first peoples. As federal construction money and various sources of cultural programming funds were suddenly available to spur the growth of these tribal institutions, because of continuing pervasive poverty in Indian communities and the lack of resources for development on many reservations, the governments of the various tribes decided to establish tribal museums as part of their general economic and community development efforts.

But the most compelling reasons for the rise of American Indian tribal museums were cultural. By the 1960s the traditional way of life



Oglala Sioux elder Benjamin Marrowbone relates tribal history at the Oglala Sioux Community College Resource Center. Photo by Tom Casey, courtesy Native American Museums Program, Smithsonian Institution



ALASKA

1. Dinjii Zhuli Inuit Museum
2. Duncan Cottage Museum
3. Kuzhgie Cultural Center
4. Sealaska Heritage Foundation & Tribal Archives
5. Yugtarvik Regional Museum

ARIZONA

6. Colorado River Indian Tribal Museum
7. Gila Indian Center
8. Hopi Tribal Museum
9. Hopi Tribe Cultural Center
10. Navajo Community College Museum
11. Navajo Tribal Museum

CALIFORNIA

12. Hoopa Tribal Museum
13. Malki Museum, Inc.
14. Rincon Tribal Education Center
15. Sherman Indian School Museum

CONNECTICUT

16. Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum

FLORIDA

17. Miccosukee Cultural Center
18. Seminole Tribal Museum

IDAHO

19. Fort Hall Reservation Museum

MAINE

20. Penobscot Museum Project

MASSACHUSETTS

21. Wampanoag Indian Program of Plymouth Plantation

MICHIGAN

22. Chief Blackbird Home Museum

MINNESOTA

23. Ayer Trading Post

MONTANA

24. Flathead Indian Museum

NEVADA

25. Stewart Indian Museum Assoc., Inc.

NEW MEXICO

26. Acoma Museum
27. Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Inc.
28. Institute of American Indian Arts Museum
29. Jicarilla Arts & Crafts & Museum
30. Mescalero Apache Cultural Center
31. San Ildefonso Pueblo Museum
32. Zuni Archaeology Program, Museum of the Zuni People

NEW YORK

33. Akwesasne Museum
34. American Indian Community House, Inc.
35. Museum of the American Indian
36. Native American Center for the Living Arts
37. Seneca Iroquois National Museum

NORTH CAROLINA

38. Museum of the Cherokee Indian
39. Native American Resource Center

NORTH DAKOTA

40. Three Affiliated Tribes Museum

OKLAHOMA

41. Atolola Art Lodge
42. Cherokee National Museum, TSA-LA-GI
43. Creek Council House Museum
44. Five Civilized Tribes Museum
45. Kiowa Tribal Museum
46. Osage Tribal Museum
47. Potawatomi Indian Nation Archives and Museum
48. Seminole Nation Museum
49. Tonkawa Tribal Museum
50. Wichita Memory Exhibit Museum

PENNSYLVANIA

51. Lenni Lenape Historical Society

RHODE ISLAND

52. Tomaquog Indian Memorial Museum

SOUTH DAKOTA

53. Father Buechel Memorial Museum
54. The Heritage Center, Inc.
55. Oglala Sioux Community College Resource Center
56. Sioux Indian Museum

TEXAS

57. Alabama-Coushatta Tribal Museum
58. Ysleta Pueblo Museum

UTAH

59. Ute Tribal Museum

WASHINGTON

60. Daybreak Star Arts Center
61. Makah Cultural Research Center
62. Suquamish Museum
63. Yakima Cultural Heritage Center

WISCONSIN

64. Buffalo Art Center
65. Oneida Nation Museum
66. Stockbridge Munsee Historical Library and Museum

WYOMING

67. Arapaho Cultural Museum

Pueblo singers provide songs and music for a traditional dance performance presented as part of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center's Living Arts Program. Photo courtesy Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico



Suggested reading

Brascoupe, Simon, ed. *Directory of North American Indian Museums and Cultural Centers*. Salamanca, New York: North American Indian Museum Association, 1981.

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Fuller, Nancy. "Native American Museums Development and Related Issues, A Bibliography." *Council for Museum Anthropology Newsletter* 9(1) (1984): 9-15.

Lurie, Nancy. "American Indians and Museums — A Love-Hate Relationship." *Old Northwest* 2(3) (1976): 235-251.

Sturtevant, William. *Reshuffling Patrimonies: The Sharing of Anthropological Collections*. American Association of Museums Annual Meeting, Boston, 1980.

Handbook of North American Indians. William C. Sturtevant, ed. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

in nearly all American Indian communities in the United States had changed dramatically. Considerable concern was expressed that the Indian communities now needed somehow to preserve, reinforce, and emphasize their traditional cultural institutions; thus they began to collect the artifacts that represented these institutions and symbolized tribal ideals, and to house them in appropriate new settings, called tribal museums.

Importantly, there was also a growing need to retrieve, where possible, portions of their cultural patrimony which had left tribal ownership and now resided in the hands of non-Indian people and their museums. This so-called repatriation movement has also been accompanied by cooperative "extended loan" agreements between established non-Indian museums and emerging tribal museums. Also, the development of museum training programs provided some tribes with a nucleus of trained cadre of tribal professionals experienced in the various fields of museum work. While many problems — financial, political, and professional — continue to face tribal museums, tribal governments nevertheless continue to recognize the tremendous value of these representative cultural and educational institutions, not only for their own people but for all who wish to learn more about the unique cultures of American Indian tribal groups. In this way the various tribal museums are helping fill the void by presenting the story of their peoples from a new perspective.



Makah elder Lida Colfax tells a whaling tale inside the Makah Museum longhouse. Photo courtesy Ruth and Lois Kirk



Jenny Thlunaut, a 93-year-old Tlingit Indian from Klukwan, Alaska, instructs a student how to weave a Chilkat blanket as part of a Heritage Study Program sponsored by the Sealaska Heritage Foundation and the Institute of Alaskan Native Arts. Photo by Larry McNeil, courtesy Sealaska Heritage Foundation and Tribal Archive, Juneau, Alaska

At the Rincon Indian Education Center, Valley Center, California, Luiseno children are taught about the traditional uses of native plants. Photo by Susan Dyal

