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## **National Anthropological Archives Receives Grant from President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities**

The Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives has received a \$323,000 "Save America's Treasures" grant from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. The grant will ensure long-term preservation and better access to the Archives' endangered-languages manuscripts.

The National Anthropological Archives is the nation's principal repository of original documentation for spoken, endangered and extinct Native American languages. Approximately 250 American Indian languages are represented in the collection. For many of these languages documentation exists nowhere else.

The collection traces its origin to an 1879 Act of Congress creating an official repository for documents concerning American Indians that were collected by the Great Western Surveys of the United States. The archive was directed by John Wesley Powell, himself an explorer deeply committed to the study of Indian languages. Under his direction the founding collection of 670 manuscripts increased to more than 5,000 as he dispatched early anthropologists and linguists to the field, recruited Indian agents to collect word lists and drew together important materials that predated the establishment of the collection.

The cultural and historical value of the collection is inestimable. It includes vocabularies, grammars, lexicons, synonymies, questionnaires, elicitations, texts and narratives ranging from a Poosepatuck Indian vocabulary collected by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson in 1791 to 19th-century illustrations of Plains Indian sign language. Equally important is the cultural knowledge embedded in these records. The manuscripts include words and meanings that are no longer known and pronunciations that are no longer to be heard.

According to Robert Leopold, the director of the National Anthropological Archives, this is an endangered archive of endangered languages. "The collection is threatened by the deterioration of

paper and by damage from repeated handling,” he said. “Each language document is so rare and unique, each bit of paper so culturally precious, that when the corner of a dog-eared page bearing text is lost, that vocabulary item may never be known or spoken again.”

The collections are used each year by more than 600 on-site academic researchers as well as by Native Americans for whom these primary documents are key to understanding their language, culture and history. This archival collection is also a primary resource for burgeoning tribal language revitalization programs. The preservation of at-risk items and digitization for online access will broaden access to endangered language materials with unparalleled research value and cultural relevance. More than 8,200 pages of Cherokee-language materials have already been made available via SIRIS, the Smithsonian’s online catalog.

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President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities

<http://www.pcah.gov/>

SIRIS, the Smithsonian’s Online Catalog

<http://www.siris.si.edu/>