

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
February 2 – 4, 2010  
Washington, D.C.**

***Native American Protocols Forum Annual Report:  
August 13, 2009, Annual Forum, Austin, Texas  
(Prepared by Diversity Committee Chair Terry Baxter)***

**BACKGROUND**

In 2008, the SAA Council established a three-year discussion of the *Native American Protocols* (NAP) and implementation experiences at the SAA Annual Meetings. The SAA President was charged with creating a group to develop a three-year series of forums at the 2009, 2010, and 2011 Annual Meetings. This working group included members of the SAA Diversity Committee and the Native American Archives Roundtable and was provided wonderful staff support by SAA.

The working group decided on a three year plan. For the 2009 Forum, the intent was to insure that membership had had full opportunity to voice concerns about, support for, or any other views and opinions related to the *Protocols* and their relationship to SAA and to archives and archivists in general. The 2010 Forum is intended to present programs and projects that are using the *Protocols* as a basis for their discussions of the appropriate treatment of Native American archival materials held by nontribal institutions. The desire is for participants to investigate both the strengths and the weaknesses of the *Protocols* in real-world situations. The 2011 Forum is intended to discuss the future of the *Protocols* and what role, if any, SAA might play in that future.

In Austin, the working group members in attendance met the day before the Forum to talk about the Forum and to begin discussions of the 2010 and 2011 Forums.

**THE 2009 FORUM**

The following is a brief synopsis of the Forum. Two detailed sets of notes, taken by Karen Underhill and Keara Duggan, are available upon request.

- Ruth Bayhille opened the Forum with a blessing, and Terry Baxter discussed the meeting agenda.
- Jennifer O’Neal discussed the American Library Association’s Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCE) Nurturing Understanding and Respect initiative

(<http://wo.ala.org/tce/>). She discussed the background of the initiative, its status (at the time in 4<sup>th</sup> draft), the hope that SAA would support the initiative, and the desire for higher-level cooperative work between SAA and ALA on cultural property management.

- Terry discussed the background of the Forum, including the 2008 SAA Task Force, its report, and the resultant NAP Forum Working Group.
- Ruth set the cultural tone for the conversation by sharing the concept and context for a “talking stick,” a tool which fosters respectful listening and communal opportunities to speak. She tied her horse fetish, Lucy, to the talking stick (the microphone) so it could be used to create order out of chaos. The procedure was that if you wished to talk, you raised your hand and were given the talking stick. You then handed it to the next person who wished to speak. This is what the *Protocols* are all about: respect and support of beliefs and epistemologies. **This worked so well** – both as a tool for understanding what the *Protocols* are about as well as a tool for structuring conversation.
- The bulk of the Forum involved people discussing issues related to the NAP as well as support for it. There were about 45 people in attendance, and there were at least 22 individuals who made at least one comment. The conversation was much less heated than the brown bag forum in 2008. But there was still a significant amount of give and take about the proper role of both the NAP and SAA. The following distillation of the comments is representative. The two sets of notes provide much more detailed conversations and, as stated above, are available upon request.
  - Many museums and archives already have the best practices outlined in the *Protocols* in place. The *Protocols* represent an affirmation of relationship building and diplomacy.
  - There are still questions about the impact of the *Protocols*. Will there be mandatory repatriation of existing collections? How do the *Protocols* affect past collecting and copyright? How should contact be made with tribes and with whom? Whose property is it?
  - The focus on dialog and collaboration wove through several comment threads. How best can we begin a dialog? Consider the resurging interest in documentation strategies by cooperating from the forefront and avoiding adversarial relationships. Construct formal and informal networks.
  - Continued focus on education (both formal and informal) in achieving the *Protocols* aims. Educate non-American Indian archivists about how to make contact: express humility, observe first, think and act slowly, provide space, practice patience. Work with non-indigenous populations to educate, to construct a shared memory. How do we address job turnover . . . creating a climate for long-term sustainability of communication?

- The issues cross both professional (see TCE above) and geographic boundaries. “The 49<sup>th</sup> parallel is an artificial product of the ‘settler society.’”
- Significant issues related to rights. Who has the right to represent a community? Each community is unique, with many levels of complexity. Who can speak for a community? Who do you ask? What happens when there are disagreements or differences within a Native American community?
- “Trust, respect, listening. It is part of my job. Who could know more about the records [but the community of origin]?” Learning more is fun.

Participants were encouraged to continue to send suggestions/comments to the Working Group, its individual members, or SAA leaders. The meeting closed with a blessing.