
For Information

REPORT TITLE: **Transfer of Standing Bear Documents from Region of Peel Archives to Oglala Library and Archives, Kyle, South Dakota**

FROM: Gary Kent, CPA, CGA, ICD.D, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide an update on the successful transfer of culturally and historically significant indigenous archival material from the collection of the Region of Peel Archives to the Oglala Library and Archives, Woksape Tipi Archives and Tribal Repository, Kyle, South Dakota.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2020 an intriguing hand-written letter and watercolour illustration was discovered and investigated by archivist Samantha Thompson, among a vast body of records collected in the 1930s by local historian, William Perkins Bull. Bull's papers were later donated to the Region of Peel Archives.
 - The letter, written in an old German script, was translated, revealing its significance. Lakota artist and community leader, Standing Bear (1859-1933) shares his first-hand memories of his early years, and of his participation in the defense of Indigenous lands in the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn. The accompanying watercolour and pencil sketch, drawn by Standing Bear, depicts a Sundance ceremony lead by Sitting Bull.
 - A staff recommendation was put forward to the Regional Archivist proposing that the material be deaccessioned and transferred to an archival repository more closely associated with the Lakota people, ideally at its place of origin. Senior management approved deaccessioning in 2021.
 - Transfer arrangements were made with the Oglala Lakota College, Woksape Tipi Archives and Tribal Repository in Kyle, South Dakota. Located within the Pine Ridge Reservation.
 - Samantha Thompson worked closely with Oglala Library and other experts on the lengthy process of cross-border repatriation; a process made more complicated by on-going pandemic restrictions.
 - This good news story came to a successful conclusion in December 2021 when fine arts shippers safely delivered the items to South Dakota.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

In 2020 an intriguing hand-written letter and watercolour illustration was discovered and investigated by archivist Samantha Thompson. It was found among a vast body of records

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collected in the 1930s by local historian, William Perkins Bull, and later donated to the Region of Peel Archives.

The documents were initially a mystery, as the letter was written in Kurrent, a now disused Old German script. Thompson was able to call upon the expertise of a family acquaintance with a knowledge of old German, to translate the document.

The three-page letter was composed by Lakota artist and community leader, Standing Bear (1859-1933) in the early 1930s, as dictated to his Austrian born wife Louise. Standing Bear shares his memories of his early years, and of his participation in the defense of Indigenous lands in the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25–26, 1876. The conflict with Lt. Col. George Custer's troops remains one of the most pivotal battles in US history.

The watercolour and pencil illustration labelled "Sundance" and identifies one of the participants as "Sitting Bull" as he is leading a Sundance ceremony. The illustration was drawn by Standing Bear.

2. Deaccession Process

The letter and artwork were determined to have cultural and historical significance. The Battle of the Little Big Horn had a decisive impact on the Lakota people and is recognized as a holiday in the US. The personal account, written by Standing Bear, a Lakota leader who witnessed the Battle as a young man, is of great historical significance because it provides an account from an indigenous perspective. Very few written accounts of the Battle are available.

A recommendation was put forward to the Regional Archivist proposing that the material be deaccessioned from the collection and transferred to an archival repository more closely associated with Lakota indigenous culture; preferably in South Dakota, where the documents originated. Senior management approved the deaccessioning in 2021.

3. Transfer

Transfer arrangements were made with the Oglala Lakota College, Woksape Tipi Archives and Tribal Repository in Kyle, South Dakota. Located within the Pine Ridge Reservation itself, the college is one of the first tribally-controlled colleges in the United States. It is also where Standing Bear and his wife Louise resided until their deaths.

Samantha Thompson worked with Archivist Tawa Ducheneaux at the Oglala Library, and other experts on the complex process of cross-border repatriation. Planning was paused multiple times due to COVID-19 pandemic. Participants had hoped to meet in South Dakota when Thompson hand-delivered the document. For safety reasons it was ultimately transferred by fine art shippers, arriving securely in early December 2021.

First to handle the precious documents, in an emotional homecoming, was Arthur Amiotte, a great-grandson of Standing Bear. A celebrated artist and scholar himself, Amiotte has consulted for museums worldwide about Standing Bear's work. He had decisively authenticated the documents prior to transfer. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the delivery and unboxing was hosted by the Journey Museum and Learning Center in Rapid City to cut down on visits to the vulnerable Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

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Amiotte, described the discovery and transfer of this historically significant as a matter of “almost spiritual transfiguration” for him personally.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Peel Archives is proud to have ensured that these recently discovered indigenous archival records, of great cultural and historical significance, could be transferred safely to its place of origin, where it can best be cared for, interpreted and valued.

Authored By: Jim Leonard, Regional Archivist; Samantha Thompson, Archivist

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Kent." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Gary Kent, CPA, CGA, ICD.D, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services