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Collaboration and Mentorship in the Organization of an American Indian Family Collection: A Case Study in Service Learning at the University of Oklahoma

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Cover Page Footnote

When she was 16 months old, RubyBear Sipes walked in to Copeland Hall on the campus of the University of Oklahoma, which temporarily housed her grandfather's collection. The collection holds the stories of her ancestors. She played as the interns listened to how the collection came to be. She colored as the structure of the finding tool evolved. In October RubyBear will be 4 years old, and with this publication more students, researchers, scholars, and families can better understand how native archives can support the work of learning. This is her grandfather's legacy as well as her own legacy.

This case study is available in Journal of Western Archives: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol13/iss1/3

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines an experiment in archival practice and mentorship undertaken at the University of Oklahoma (OU) during the spring semester of 2019. The project concerned the inventory of an important privately held archive in American Indian history. The case study describes the process and documentation involved in an institution assuming temporary custody of a private collection, including legal and ethical considerations of temporary custody, and explores the mentorship relationship among group of interdisciplinary faculty and students, as well as the products, both archival and non-archival, that resulted form this collaborative effort.

Introduction: A Family Collection Enters a University Setting

This case study examines an experiment in archival internship practice undertaken at the University of Oklahoma (OU) during the spring semester of 2019. The project concerned the description of an important privately-held archive in American Indian history.[1] The archives in question contained the public and private

1. The term "American Indian" is used throughout this paper as the preferred term of Dr. BigFoot, and the chosen term across a range of programs and student organizations at the University of Oklahoma.

papers of John L. Sipe, Jr. (1951-2008), who served as both one of the Chiefs of the Cheyenne Nation and as the historian of the tribe in the latter years of the last century. This archival collection was located in the home that the late Mr. Sipe shared with his wife, Professor Dolores Subia BigFoot. The project originated from a request in the summer of 2018 from Professor BigFoot (a professor at the OU Health Sciences Center) to a staff member of the OU American Indian Advocacy Council who also worked in the Dean's Office of the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. BigFoot wrote:

> *My husband was a tribal historian (died 10 years ago) with an extensive library and 72 boxes of files. Many of the files are oral stories and genealogy of the Cheyenne Tribe. I want some assistance in organizing the files, and in the process, have a student learn about Cheyenne history and get some credit hopefully as a project.*[2]

The University was being asked to undertake something that is not unusual in the field of extension work, where expertise at land grant universities like OU is broadly shared in the community via outreach. It was, however, a model new to the University's archival practice, where consultation is freely available, but organizational work is reserved for collections in the custody of the University. For the Sipe papers, OU would provide expertise and labor in the description and organization of a family collection without a reciprocal promise that, in exchange for this benefit, the University would eventually acquire the John L. Sipe, Jr. Collection. Instead, a relationship of temporary collaboration (over one semester) would be developed and result in the creation of a collection finding aid by two undergraduate student interns under the guidance of a trained archivist, a history faculty member, and the custodian of the papers. This case study describes how this group worked collaboratively, adopting the History Department internship program's service-learning model and in the process, redefined our understanding of reciprocity as we worked with the papers and learned from each other.

Placing the Project in Archival Literature

From an archival perspective, John L. Sipe, Jr. is easily recognized as a community knowledge keeper whose active trusteeship of a national history is not dependent on institutional associations or academic credentials. Aligning categories found in relevant archival literature to the experiment undertaken at OU with the John L. Sipe, Jr. Collection, the project can be described by two linked practices: "community archiving" and "participatory archiving." Writings on community archives and participatory archives by Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Elizabeth Shepherd, and Terry Cook proved affirming in our approach to a tribal family archives assembled outside of an existing repository. Our work drew on the practice of community archiving because it serves a collection gathered by and from individuals in a community (the Northern Cheyenne) to document and retain records of their history.

2. Dolores Subia BigFoot, email to Ben Keppel, June 12, 2018.

The "participatory" aspect derives from the close involvement of Dr. BigFoot and draws on Terry Cook's shifting of the archival paradigm towards a valuing of community-held archives forming part of the fabric of a "vibrant 'total archives'" beyond institutional boundaries.[3]

The Sipe project tested these archival concepts with a rigor that we are now only beginning to appreciate. This effort involved university personnel in the reorganization of a historically significant collection that is also a private family archives being preserved in a private family home. The Sipe project required university employees to leave campus at key points and to interact with someone who, although she was also a professor at the University of Oklahoma, approached the university as a private citizen with a desire to share knowledge of this family archives. That desire was grounded in Dr. BigFoot's life as an American Indian in Oklahoma, a citizen of her tribe and of the United States, and as an activist and expert in the particular traumas faced by indigenous children around the world.

The intention of the Sipe project was to produce both a tangible product, specifically a finding aid, and an internship-based learning experience. Work by the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI) well-articulated the link between "community engagement" and "service learning" in a way that allowed us to demonstrate the pedagogical value of the project to our teaching and administrative colleagues at OU. AERI notes the importance of raising "awareness and consideration of the perspectives, behaviors, and needs of many different communities" and "envisioning and exploring alternatives to [dominant] paradigms" of practice.[4] By responding to an expressed need to describe a collection that would remain in the community, we modeled an alternative to the dominant practice, which firmly embraces an acquisitive or extractive framework. Exposure to archives built and maintained outside of institutional walls introduced the student interns to archival origins and creators that they would not have experienced if they had worked on existing archives within the academic repository. What they missed in terms of exposure to well-codified archival practices within the repository, they gained in understanding the inherent human origins of archival collections as they are created or assembled by individuals.

We quickly discovered that as new as the working method of the Sipe project was to those of us at the University of Oklahoma, it is in fact reflective of many efforts by curators and archivists to establish new kinds of community relationships, unified by

3. On community and participatory archives, see Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Elizabeth Shepherd, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy, and the Mainstream," *Archival Science* 9 (2009): 71-86; and Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science* 13 (2013): 95-120. "Community archives", SAA Dictionary of Archives Terminology, accessed March 2, 2021, https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/community-archives.html.

4. The Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI), Pluralizing the Archival Curriculum Group (PACG), "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," *American Archivist* 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 69-101.

a desire to seek truth and reconciliation after centuries of unequal institutional relationships. Governmental archives themselves explicitly codify imperialistic and colonial relationships often enforced by carefully calibrated uses of state-sponsored violence.[5] As a result, there is a fundamental tension in the practice of "community archiving" between expert collaboration to describe and preserve non-institutional community records and the need for communities of origin to retain a fundamental degree of autonomy, independence, and control over the records and the narrative around which they were organized and preserved. For archivists employed by institutions where acquisition is a metric of success and where effort is measured in the reduction of backlogs of unprocessed materials, committing to archival collaborations for collections not owned by the institution requires an expansive and generous view of the archival universe. Acknowledging that significant archives exist beyond institutions in what has been called the "archival multiverse" opens us to the practice of "archival extension services" to individuals and communities—not just the institution, as first pitched by F. Gerald Ham in the "the post-custodial" model.[6] In addition, we suggest that this practice of action on records not institutionally owned is implicit in an internship model where, by definition, the practitioners (students) work in settings where they have no permanent institutional affiliation or expectation of custodianship. Our effort to assist in organizing a physical collection in our custody for mere months, with a temporary workforce of interns, and an arbitrary time limit of fifteen weeks defined by a course-credit model, could easily have become transactional. We believe it did not, as evident by ongoing engagement and the collaborative effort of this essay nearly a year after the project "ended" with the conclusion of the semester.

Project Scope and Design: Staffing, Logistics, and the Memorandum of Understanding

The project, as stated earlier, began with a query. The historical nature of the collection meant that Dr. BigFoot's question eventually landed with Dr. Ben Keppel, Professor of History and coordinator of the department's service-learning internship program. Dr. Keppel reached out to the OU Libraries, contacting Bridget Burke, Associate Dean for Special Collections, about advice on the project. After a few weeks of information gathering, BigFoot, Keppel, and Burke developed a plan to bring the collection to campus for the duration of the semester. Two interns were recruited for

5. Amy Cooper, "Issues in Native American Archives," *Collection Management* 27, no. 2 (2002): 43-54; Danielle Allard and Shawna Ferris, "Antiviolence and Marginalized Communities: Knowledge Creation, Community Mobilization, and Social Justice through a Participatory Archiving Approach," *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 360-383. Acknowledging the importance of including copies of state records in collections gathered by and serving American Indians (following Vine Deloria): Jennifer R. O'Neal "The Right to Know: Decolonizing Native American Archives," *Journal of Western Archives* 6, no. 1 (2015).

6. AERI, "Educating for the Archival Multiverse," (2011); F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 207-216.

the project: Kasimir Mackey, a history major specializing in American Indian history, and Tamah Minnis, a senior-level major in the Department of Native American Studies. The interns would be mentored and supervised by Professor BigFoot, Professor Keppel, and Associate Dean Burke. Professor Amanda Cobb-Greetham, Chair of the Native American Studies Department and Director of the Native Nations Center at OU, also sponsored the work. Professor R. Warren Metcalf, who specializes in 20th century American Indian history, served as an academic consultant to the project.

In order for this work to proceed, however, Dr. BigFoot was required to agree to a significant concession: giving temporary physical custody of the collection to the university. As stated in the Memorandum of Understanding as outlined by the University's General Counsel, Dr. BigFoot "hereby waives, releases and forever discharges the University for damages or destruction to the Collections resulting from the storage or inventory process during the internship."[7] Professor BigFoot signed the memorandum, with these words to the legal department: "I hope that this will allow for next steps to occur. I realize I am releasing liability from the University, but I hope the University will still practice careful and thoughtful safety measures in transporting and storage."[8]

The project team first encountered the collection in January 2019 at the home of Dr. BigFoot, where it was housed in file cabinets and boxes. To retain the original order during transport to campus, each of these cabinet drawers and boxes was given a code (e.g., cabinet A, drawer 1) that was used in labeling boxes as collection materials were placed into record cartons. The boxes were delivered to a secure office area in Copeland Hall on the University of Oklahoma campus to allow interns Tamah Minnis and Kasimir Mackey to handle and complete an inventory of the collection during the spring 2019 semester. Folder headings were transcribed as written, and entered into a standard archival processing spreadsheet developed for use in the OU Western History Collections. The list was then reviewed and edits were made where acronyms or abbreviations were unclear, or where personal or place names needed to be regularized. In general, the folders were left in the order they were found; the interns were able to describe, but not re-arrange, the collection in the time available. Material identified as "personal"—primarily health or financial information related to the Sipe and BigFoot families—was separated and returned. The original cabinet drawer location was entered as location information in the processing spreadsheet, allowing material to be transferred back into the filing cabinets in the same order when returned to Dr. BigFoot's home.

7. Memorandum of Understanding, Internship Collaboration between OU Department of History and Department of Native American Studies and Dolores Subia BigFoot, PhD, Archiving Internship, Spring 2019, 1.

8. Dolores Subia Bigfoot, email to Ben Keppel, January 8, 2019.

John L. Sipe, Jr. as Tribal Historian & Archives Collector

The John L. Sipe, Jr. Collection contains nearly 1,900 file folders of documents relating to the Cheyenne people and to the Sipe and BigFoot families. Sipe corresponded with tribal and federal entities and cultural organizations across the country and internationally, and was engaged in efforts around repatriation, language retention and revitalization, and self-representation. Sipe's interests were wide-ranging and inclusive, and his collection documents education, health, welfare, land ownership, family histories, treaties, litigation, and military engagements and incarceration. Over the course of several decades of research, community engagement, and tribal leadership, Sipe compiled material created by a variety of sources, including federal agencies (Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), U.S. Department of the Interior, and National Archives and Records Administration); local administrative agencies of the BIA, including the Concho, Darlington, Seger, El Reno, and Upper Arkansas agencies; and boarding schools, including Haskell Institute, Phoenix Indian School, Chilocco Indian Agricultural School, and Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The collection is especially rich in agency census records from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sipe conducted interviews with descendants and gathered material on prisoners of war held at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. He also collected documents related to the Sand Creek and Washita massacres in which Cheyenne people were killed as a result of actions by the US military. His relationship with Donald Berthrong, a historian who taught in and chaired the History Department at the University of Oklahoma and at Perdue University, and with whom he collaborated, is well documented in the collection.

While Sipe lived in Oklahoma, the geographical reach of the collection ranges across the southern Great Plains and north to Montana. Communities represented in the collection include the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, Kiowa Tribe, Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma, Miami Nation of Oklahoma, Navajo Nation, Otoe-Missouria Tribe, Seneca-Cayuga Nation, Shawnee Tribe, Choctaw Nation, United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Delaware Nation, Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Nez Perce Tribe, and Sac & Fox Nation. Formats include correspondence, photographs, manuscript material, original documents, clippings, transcriptions of interviews and oral histories, maps, and photocopies obtained from multiple sources. Publications by Sipe, Berthrong, and others, including Sipe's writing for the Oklahoma newspaper *Watonga Republican*, are also represented in the files.

As the project proceeded over the spring 2019 semester, and the group worked through these records, something came more sharply into view for all of us: the life and career of John L. Sipe, Jr. followed a pattern very different from that traditionally associated with scholarship and leadership in an academic setting, the site most familiar to many members of our working group. Instead, Sipe's life and work followed a path where the personal, institutional, community, and tribal intersected constantly and productively. A semester of intensive work in the papers leaves no doubt that Sipe was a scholar who engaged with academic, institutional, community,

and journalistic networks, and was highly regarded across multiple disciplines and domains. What distinguished his education and intellectual matriculation is that it took place outside the institutional structure of a university. As Professor BigFoot recounts, her husband's training was deeply imbedded in a life experience of disciplined commitment to cultural preservation and enrichment that was inclusive in its origins and often outside of academic pathways:

> *From his young days of listening closely to family elders' stories at ceremonial camps, he was attentive. At Red Moon or at Sun Dance camps or just around home, Cheyenne Chief John L. Sipe, Jr. built a career of preserving family and Cheyenne history and culture. As a historian and keeper of stories, he meticulously kept and preserved those historical records and generously provided many Cheyenne people information about their family lineage.*[9]

Sipe attended the University of Oklahoma briefly as an undergraduate, and his lifelong pursuit of knowledge meant that he often worked closely with the Western History Collection in the OU Libraries, as well as with the Oklahoma Archeological Survey located at the University. Sipe practiced what we might now call public humanities, writing for tribal and community audiences, as described by Dr. BigFoot:

> *For a number of years, as a feature writer he submitted historical articles on his family and the Cheyenne people to the* Watonga Republican *newspaper. That work was recognized in 2001, when the Oklahoma Heritage Association presented the Watonga Republican and John with its Distinguished Editorial Award for Preservation of State and Local History.*[10]

Sipe had a talent for understanding where historical documents might be found and how to access these records, and for seeing the future importance of contemporary documents. He also had, as scholars do, an intellectual network that included local, regional, national, and international collaborators ranging from the Oklahoma Historical Society to the Harvard Peabody Museum, and extensive contacts with federal agencies, including the National Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and US Department of the Interior. These institutions and colleagues supported and respected his expertise. Thus, to study John Sipe, Jr. is to challenge traditional university-based assumptions about what experiences and training make one into a scholarly leader and cultural expert.

All of these distinctions—the process by which Sipe's collection was gathered, its provenance, and its location in a home—determined the content of the archives itself. Intern Kasimir Mackey describes the ways in which the private world of Sipe's family life and history was intertwined with more traditionally public documentation of the Cheyenne people and nation:

9. Dolores Subia Bigfoot, "Stories Told, Stories Shared, Stories Held: Impressions, Memories, Regrets, Hurts, Beginnings and Endings, Promises and Blessings" (unpublished manuscript 2008).

10. Ibid.

> *This collection first started as a genealogical project by John to discover his ancestors on the Cheyenne side of his family. In [his] search to find out more about his family, he ended up learning about Cheyenne history. This project mainly focuses on the history of the Northern Cheyenne... With his experience of doing genealogy work, John was asked by many members of the Cheyenne tribe to do their genealogies. He soon found out through his genealogical research that his great-grandmother, Mochi, wife of Standing Bull, survived the Battle of Sand Creek (massacre). After discovering his tribal heritage, John Sipe branched out to document the histories of other Native American (American Indian) tribes.*[11]

The fusion of public and private within the collection itself had to be addressed fairly early in the inventory process, as Mackey recounts here:

> *As I began to document the folders that John had created, I realized that there were documents that should not be in the collection. These documents would be classified as personal information... such as medical records, marriage certificates, and personal letters to the Sipe family members. I learned... these personal documents should be separated from the collection and handed back to the owner of the collection... I found lots of personal pictures in the collection. Bridget, Tamah, Dee, and I decided that it was best to leave pictures of the family behind, since they did not belong with the rest of the materials in the collection.*[12]

Historical Service-Learning at the University of Oklahoma

The Sipe project started at the same time the OU History Department was working to recognize professional skills that can transfer out of the field, such as primary source evaluations and analysis writing. At the same time, the University administration was emphasizing the importance of "service-learning" as an ingredient of the University's public mission across its academic programs. In coordinating the internship program within the OU History Department, the Sipe project offered Professor Keppel an indispensable example in relaying to history undergraduates that becoming a teacher was not their only compelling option for making a positive contribution to historical understanding, and that other pathways were open to them in applying their knowledge and skills. During this period, the Sipe Project was one of several credit-bearing experiences that connected student interns and community partners (almost all in institutions such as libraries, archives, and museums) to focus

11. Kasimir Mackey, "Spring 2019 Internship Report," (student project final paper, University of Oklahoma, 2019), 2.

12. Ibid., 3.

specifically on how history interns could serve both the public and their own future professional aspirations.[13]

The practical case for the value of historical skills outside the traditional classroom or graduate seminar was expressed in the syllabus of the department's internship course. The stated learning outcomes for the History Internship (HIST 4950) note that "students enrolled in this course will: (1) learn how to preserve the historical record so that it may be of use both to scholars and interested members of general public; (2) create useful resources form the historical record to educate students and the general public about the value of the local and state history that is closest to their daily lives; (3) gain practical experience providing historical research and educational support on a "shoestring" budget."[14] The placement of interns in museums and archives throughout Oklahoma reflected the department's belief that exposure to primary resources as material to be preserved and as objects with interpretive possibilities would enhance student's historical skills, and also showcase the value of the OU program to public humanities around the state.[15]

The Sipe project provided an invaluable lesson about the relationship of an archivist to an historian. The archivist does not merely "serve up" the sources for intellectual consumption by the historian or scholar. As many historians readily acknowledge at the beginning of their monographs, archivists with long careers overseeing a particular collection or record group are more than brains available for factual "picking." Archivists have unique insights into where a record fits into a larger archival universe, and how it connects with surrounding events and narratives in any given time period. They are expert allies in every sense, and the scholar who does not approach archival research in this spirit of empathy and curiosity handicaps their historical understanding quite severely.

13. Since 2017, the history internship program has placed students in historically-oriented service-learning internships within the University of Oklahoma, and with other local and national partners, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Missouri State Archives, the Smithsonian Institution, and the research staff of the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, earning between one to three credits.

14. Ben Keppel, University of Oklahoma Department of History 4950-001 Spring 2019 History Internship Course Syllabus.

15. Setting learning outcomes for internships in special collections, see Maggie Gallup Kopp, "Internships in Special Collections: Experiential Pedagogy, Intentional Design, and High-Impact Practice," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 20 (Spring 2019): 12-27. For a survey of mentoring in archives focused on individuals entering or already in the profession, see Alison H. Stankrauff, Tom Sommer, and Michelle Ganz, "The Why and How of Mentoring," *Journal of Western Archives* 7, no. 1 (2016). For a discussion on the ethical components of internships that support the Sipe project's standards of care, see Alexandra M. Bisio, Steve Duckworth, Helena Egbert, Emily Haskins, and Gayle O'Hara, "Archivist to Archivist: Employing an Ethics of Care Model with Interns and Student Workers," *Journal of Western Archives* 12, no. (2021).

An Ethical Approach to Family Archives

It was critical to the success of the project to provide professional and ethical rigor beyond the language in the Memorandum of Understanding in making sure that the Sipe materials were properly protected and cared for during their semester on the OU campus. On the day before the temporary transfer of the Sipe collection from Professor BigFoot's home to the University, the team received two documents that framed our work and to which we would return in our weekly meetings to monitor progress: the *Code of Ethics of the Society of American Archivists* and *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*.[16, 17] These documents were transmitted with the following message from Associate Dean Burke:

> *When we work with archives, we are often working with records for which we are not the intended reader—these two documents address issues of privacy, respect, and stewardship with which we approach this work. Tomorrow we'll be learning more from Dr. BigFoot about Mr. Sipe's work and how the collection came together, how it has been used, and how it may be used in the future.*[18]

On January 14th, interns Kasimir Mackey and Tamah Minnis, along with Associate Dean Burke, met Professor BigFoot at her home to pack the Sipe collection and move it to a predetermined campus location. In their initial reactions, the interns reflected on practical and ethical issues. Here is what the interns recorded about taking the first essential steps of the project:

> Kasimir Mackey:
>
> *On January 14, 2019, I worked with Bridget Burke, Dee [Delores] BigFoot, and Tamah to pack up the John Sipe Collection at Dr. BigFoot's house… I keep notes and questions when I encounter folder names that I cannot interpret, when the file folder has no title, and lastly if the folder has a name but no contents, or if the folders I encounter contain personal information. I also created a separate sheet for folders I have found that contain personal information about John and his family that should be kept private… Since going through several boxes of the John Sipe Collection, I have discovered that some boxes have no overall category that would link them together, or at least not yet. Then in some boxes there is more of a theme going on, such as correspondence between the Cheyenne and the agents at the various forts.*[19]

16. "Core Values and Code of Ethics," Society of American Archivists, accessed October 14, 2020, https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics.

17. "Protocols for Native American Archival Materials," First Archivists Circle, Northern Arizona University, accessed October 14, 2020, http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html.

18. Bridget Burke, email message to the Sipe project team, January 13, 2019. The concept of "intended reader" is drawn from Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

19. Kasimir Mackey, email to Ben Keppel, February 1, 2019.

Tamah Minnis:

> *Non-Natives research with Native people has a long history of abuse, exploitation, and harm. But as a Native person doing research with other Native people, I am comforted knowing our supervisors not only encourage, but require us, to remove any files we are skeptical of being too personal. Though I learned this in my NAS [Native American Studies] classes, it is so awesome to see that this is actually being practiced by those who haven't taken the same classes as me. I am hopeful for the future of collaborative work. Dr. BigFoot has been so kind and gracious in helping us understand what is appropriate to keep and what she would prefer to keep. It is beyond me that there was a time where this kind of collaborative work was not being practiced.*[20]

The Mentoring Process: Respectful Relationships and Meaningful Knowledge Transfer

Reflecting back over the fifteen weeks of the semester's work in which there were planned weekly meetings between the interns, BigFoot, Burke, and Keppel, several key features stand out. Certainly, these meetings were key to simply keeping a laborious and detailed process on track. In the final analysis, what proved most durable and valuable about these meetings was that they helped create an important personal, yet still professional, bond between Professor BigFoot and the team, especially the interns, who were going through materials that were rooted in the experience of her immediate family. On several occasions, it was important for all of us to simply put away our laptops, pads, and pencils to simply listen as Professor BigFoot shared personal memories sparked by her husband's collection. Looking back from the vantage point of January 2020, after a year of collaboration on this project, Professor BigFoot returned to the theme of these earlier meetings, how the public preservation of the Sipe papers was rooted in the most deeply personal and private emotions:

> *For some months after my husband died… I struggled with how to manage an archival treasure that many people wanted access to, but could not be utilized since nothing was organized. I am taking a catalog of titles that is the ignition for moving forward with maintaining an active archive. I am taking energy and enthusiasm from the collective synergy from this intertwining relationship among all of us and the forward momentum of publication and having a new focus on the collection. There is so much that I am taking from everyone's attention and hard work.*[21]

20. Tamah Minnis, email to Ben Keppel, February 18, 2019.

21. Dolores Subia BigFoot, email to the Sipe project team, December 10, 2019.

Throughout the project, reflections from the interns were recorded in weekly reports; it is important to acknowledge that the interns were not immune from moments of doubt or frustration. As the work reached its midpoint, Minnis raised some important issues about how the project had begun, and expressed a concern common to processing archivists: the clerical nature of certain tasks can lead us to discount the value and meaning of the work:

> *I think Kasimir and I both would have benefited from seeing the collection before we began the work, talked more about the desires for the collection and what our work means for the future. These are questions I still have, and I know Kasimir still also has. Questions like, what will be done with the collection post internship, how is our work impacting the greater community of Cheyenne-Arapaho, etc. The answers to these questions, I think even now, would provide us motivation and assurance of the importance of our work. Luckily, this reflection has made me realize that I should ask these questions... I am not losing motivation; however, I do think a reminder of the importance of our work is always beneficial to the continuance of a project. It reminds us we are doing so much more than typing down files.*[22]

These observations remind us how quickly this project came together, and how we collectively dove into a scope and body of work knowing that the timeframe would be challenging. Reflecting on the circumstances under which this collaboration came to be, it is clear that the process of getting legal clearance, begun by Professor Keppel in the fall preceding the spring internship, in reality should have begun a month or two earlier. None of us anticipated the amount of time spent waiting for appropriate language from a small staff of two OU attorneys with many other university matters requiring their immediate attention. Had we been able to execute the MOU at the end of the fall semester instead of the first day of the next semester, the issues that Minnis rightly raised could have been addressed more clearly at the very beginning, with the long-term outcome more clearly understood in the context of the short-term tasks we undertook.

Even with a longer runway to the project, the reality of internships is that they are finite, and that their duration (fifteen weeks) is based on an academic calendar, rather than determined by the organic needs of the project at hand. As it was, the project was reiterative and required both the interns and the advisors to manage a certain amount of ambiguity. Our workplan for the Sipe collection was adjusted throughout the semester as we began to see that recording the files, and not arranging or grouping them, was about as far as we would be able to get in the time we had. This meant that we accomplished less in terms of an archival product but remained committed to our time together (roughly an hour a week separate from the students' archival work) because it was essential to listen, reflect, and see the collection in context. While that hour could have gone to transcribing folder

22. Tamah Minnis, email to Ben Keppel, March 4, 2019.

headings, it was more valuable to our students and the project overall to spend that time interacting with Dr. BigFoot, Dr. Keppel, and Associate Dean Burke.

Student Learning Outcomes: Presenting at Undergraduate Research Day

From her first approach to the American Indian Advisory Council about the possibility of reorganizing the John L. Sipe, Jr. papers for future researchers, Professor BigFoot had expressed the hope that this would be an opportunity for emerging scholars from within the student body of the University of Oklahoma to produce something of scholarly value that would not only serve a larger public interest, but also provide the students with the opportunity to share their own work, thoughts, and independent voices. The present essay is one outcome of this desire, which was shared by every member of the working group. Working within the context of a semester unit, and seeking a public forum for the students to present within that timeframe, Mackey and Minnis applied to present their work to the University of Oklahoma's Undergraduate Research Day, a forum for student achievement administered every spring by the Honors College. While the suggestion that Undergraduate Research Day would be a valuable forum for combining teaching and learning in a public setting came from Professor BigFoot and Associate Dean Burke, Mackey and Minnis quickly took ownership of every step of the process, including the conceptualization and organization of their presentation. Drawing upon weekly meeting guidance, confidence gained from ongoing collaboration, and intimate knowledge of the collection, they proceeded without any direct intervention from the rest of the team. Mackey and Minnis chose to frame their experience as a contribution to "community archiving," a concept that had been introduced to the group with an important reference to the formative article "Whose Memory? Whose Archives?" that was brought to the group's attention midway through the semester.[23]

After describing the logistics of the collaboration between the University Libraries, the Department of History, and the Department of Native American Studies, Mackey and Minnis led with a key value that they had taken away from the experience. For Mackey and Minnis, they were engaged in a project that would open up the entire process of scholarship, placing special emphasis on the collaborative element. They observed that in this project, the weight of authority was recalibrated to recognize the authority of those previously treated unequally in even the most hospitable interactions with the dominant culture: "For many years, archival research and historical research was mono-vocal. Indigenous people have been, historically 'researched' as opposed to being a part of the conversation." It was important to

23. Flinn, Stevens, and Shepard, "Whose Memories, Whose Archives?"

Mackey and Minnis that their work be understood as part of a long-term "movement [by scholars] towards working with communities to…help them tell *their* history."[24]

Conclusion: Lessons of the John L. Sipe, Jr. Project

Understanding what our work might contribute to the knowledge about how to preserve the past has required us to rethink our general assumptions about archival efforts and reflect on what we have learned and what we have to offer as a result of this collaborative effort. Our collaborative reflection on this experience, which continued informally through spring 2020, brought us face-to-face with some key questions. What affirmative obligations do archivists have in making their expertise available to those members of the public who do not regularly interact with universities or visit museums? From this emerged a second question: should archivists dedicate their specialized skills primarily to preserving the records of those whose power and historical significance is not only widely recognized, but also institutionally validated (for example, political, economic, military, and social leaders of the dominant culture)? Or, should archivists, working on behalf of the institutions that employ them, seek to diversify the content, focus, and locus of existing archives to include records of those persons and groups of people who are, by social and cultural design, placed outside of or even in opposition to these well-established and supported places of archival power? What do archivists owe to those who choose to preserve their records themselves, on their own home ground?

Our experience convinces us that all of these potential obligations and possibilities must be on the table; they must be front of mind as institutions such as the University of Oklahoma consider unforeseen opportunities offered by community members (such as the Sipe project). These possibilities must be viewed not through a traditional lens of what can be taken from the community and kept in the University, but as needed first steps toward new relationships that demonstrate that former relationships emphasizing the power and expertise of the institution in relation to community "others" are being reconfigured and replaced with something new and yet to be named. New legal formulas that increase the accountability of institutions to surrounding communities must be explored. These considerations inevitably bring us back to the memorandum that framed the work of our team during the spring semester of 2019. We are unanimous in our regret that, in order for the Sipe project to gain university expertise, Dr. BigFoot had to relinquish so much of her family's rights via a liability release. We do not know what alternative model could have been devised within the finite situation in which we were participants. We do know these questions must be raised so that new resources and models can be created to finally begin to equalize relationships between non-institutional record holders and the archival organizations that might assist them. Can institutional resources be invested in order to equalize the risks in such collaborations? We believe so.

24. Kasimir Mackey and Tamah Minnis, "Collaborative Archival Research; The Cheyenne Chief John L. Sipe, Jr. Collection" (presentation, University of Oklahoma Undergraduate Research Day, Norman, OK, April 6, 2019).

As the working team gathered to plan for a publication documenting the project, we approached the question of what was important about our effort in terms of reciprocity: what gifts did we bring to the project, and what gifts did we take. We close with the words of Dr. BigFoot, which capture the ways in which the project transcended the transactional. Yes, Dr. BigFoot acknowledged, the primary goal of the project was inventorying the collection, but

> *…the many lessons learned of ethical perspectives, collection procedures, terminology, oral histories, research methods, presentation skills, and process cannot be estimated and is greatly appreciated… The two supervising faculty, Dr. Ben Keppel and Associate Dean Bridget J. Burke, demonstrated the level of professionalism, mentorship, and leadership toward the students that allowed for them to be curious, question, feel valued and trustworthy, maintain peer support with each other, benefit from historical reflections, and gain insight into their own learning and personal assessment. (The students) came to value their own contribution to history and to current preservation of historical records. It has been a wonderful, productive partnership between the University of Oklahoma and the family of Cheyenne Chief John L. Sipe.*[25]

Today, the John L. Sipe, Jr. Collection, after inventory, consists of 41 boxes that reflect Sipe's interests and activities and the informational needs of his tribe. The records substantiate a history that has become well known (such as the complicated contribution of the Carlisle school to Indian education), as well as stories that have yet to be known or fully understood by scholars who still work within a framework constructed predominantly around histories written from non-indigenous perspectives and sources. It is the records of the state—of USA armies and agencies, census officers and allotment officials—that form much of the written documentation available to scholars of American Indians. It is not only Sipe's compilation of these records, but also the addition of his own interviews and his genealogical research, which along with his correspondence and interpretation, make the collection a unique and significant resource for researchers.

The Sipe collection has generated interest, especially when it became known that an inventory was developed and maintained as part of the collection. Tribal community members made appointments to use the collection starting in late 2019. Many of the Cheyenne elders who were interested in the collection mainly wanted to have the opportunity to listen to family stories, rather than search documents. Some of this may be due to poor eyesight, or to a hesitancy based on not knowing how to review documents in the finding aid. The collection remains in the BigFoot family home, and as with everything else impacted by the pandemic, once 2020 began there was a high level of hesitation to allow anyone into the residence (much as institutional archives shut down their reading rooms due to COVID-19). As long as

25. "Making It Personal," University of Oklahoma University Libraries, accessed October 14, 2020, https://libraries.ou.edu/content/making-it-personal.

there is the need for social isolation, the collection is not available to the public. However, the collection has not been dormant: Ah-in-nist Sipes, John's son, has been using John's letters to research Cheyenne teachings and leadership strategies for survival during the early reservation years. He has been utilizing the collection to verify his father's stories, both those written in newspapers and those delivered as part of an oral tradition, comparing Sipe's words with those of other historians.

In the course of our work on the John L. Sipe, Jr. collection, we have each given the gift of our undivided concentration and commitment to preserving American Indian history as a rich and formative vein of the history of the United States. Although we recognize the potential public value of the archival finding aid that was our most tangible objective and product, the real wealth of this experience that has stretched from a semester into more than a full year of formal and informal collaboration lays in the transmission of knowledge and values that we call simply "mentoring." From this project, we gained a shared understanding of collaboration between generations, between scholars, and between peoples as the essential ingredient in not only preserving human history in its fullest dimensions, but also in creating new and perhaps enduring relationships.

The Sipe project demonstrates that a willingness to involve interns in ways of archiving outside of traditional acquisitive models of archival practice can result in rich learning experience and exposes our diverse interns to ways of honoring non-institutional archives. "Institutional knowledge" is not only associated with bricks and mortar. It resides also in social and cultural "institutions" in the form of community knowledge holders who both keep and share a community's history. In addition, the Sipe project emphasized the importance of enabling undergraduate students to gain work experiences that create the ingredients of professional endurance and success over time, and build transferrable analytical skills that student interns such as Mackey and Minnis can carry with them in whatever they pursue.