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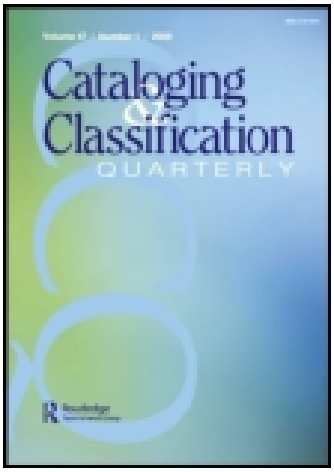

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Decolonizing Ethnographic Documentation: A Critical History of the Early Museum Catalogs at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

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Decolonizing Ethnographic Documentation: A Critical History of the Early Museum Catalogs at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History

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To inform debates about decolonizing museum records, this article maps the history of cataloging at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when material heritage was collected for museums from Indigenous peoples, the knowledge within those communities was often measured against Eurocentric biases that saw Indigenous knowledge as the object of material culture research, not a contribution to it. This article thus argues for a historical approach to understand how standards in object description involve assumptions that have resulted in a lack of Indigenous knowledge in museum records from this time.

KEYWORDS *cataloging, history of catalogs, museums, Indigenous knowledge, documentation, bias*

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative museum practice, a growing recognition of Indigenous rights, shifting social values favoring "multiculturalism," "inclusivity," and "access," have sought to change the way museums interpret and display Indigenous material heritage.[1] Further, in the wake of increasing resistance to dominant and exclusionary institutional norms on the part of Indigenous communities worldwide, in particular North America and Australia, many partnerships have developed that seek to ameliorate relationships between museums

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and source communities more broadly.[2] These partnerships include the creation of collaborative exhibits, the dedicated hiring of Indigenous people in museums, and the establishment of small community-focused museums for example.[3] These are important ways in which more postcolonial and equitable relationships can be achieved. However, it has been argued that there are more pervasive structures of discrimination that exist in museums, such as the documentation conventions that organize the collections themselves.[4] Despite pertinent scholarship in libraries and archives,[5] museological literature has yet to fully address whether the catalogs and documentation strategies themselves need reform. Even in collaborative, inclusive atmospheres, museum catalogs are often the last places to see change.

As has been shown, field requirements and normalized naming conventions in catalogs prescribe certain ways of knowing that ultimately obscure others.[6] Standards, classification systems, and even ad hoc naming practices thus confine, but also construct what is possible to document about objects. A critical question for museum studies is whether or not museum catalogs can incorporate a kind of fluidity that is seen as necessary when dealing with diverse ways of knowing, particularly with Indigenous knowledges.[7] This article therefore addresses the historical importance of museum cataloging schemes and seeks to develop a critical history of museum catalogs that maps the roots and potential shortcomings of these documentation practices which originated with the collection and recording of Indigenous material culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Inspired by research that calls to "decolonize" systems of documentation and classification,[8] and by recent attempts to re-work digital museum catalogs for specific Indigenous communities,[9] this article offers a historical perspective on the early categories of description applied to Indigenous material heritage in the Anthropology department at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) from 1848 until the turn of the twentieth century.[10]

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, imperialism is not only the economic expansion of a nation or the subjugation of "others" but it is a "discursive field of knowledge."[11] For ethnographic museums, this field of knowledge was enacted in the naming of objects and people through the application of scientific methods prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Often, when Indigenous heritage was collected and recorded, local voice was measured against a Eurocentric norm or standard of research. Information about objects in early ethnographic research excluded, through a variety of ways, the validity of the knowledge of those who produced them. The categories and documentation practices developed during this time have also formed the basis for standards of practice in the contemporary museum catalog. This article presents the example of the early catalog at the NMNH with a focus on the origins of the documentation practices in collecting guides and ledgers, prior to the existence of a card catalog. It examines the collection of field data through a reading of the categories developed

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in the field guides, and discusses the development of a museum recording system in the ledger books. The importance of such a system cannot be understated, it allowed researchers at the Smithsonian to quantify objects, conduct research, and even simply locate the objects in the vastly growing collections. This article demonstrates that object descriptions turned items of Indigenous material heritage into specimens that could be measured for the purpose of "good" science and therefore establish ethnographic authority and objectivity.

Despite this critical lens, the goal of this article is not to uproot an entrenched system at the NMNH, or to negatively critique the institution for methods that were put in place more than a century ago. Alternatively, this analysis seeks to provide an interesting history of the catalog, and shows when categories of description originated. This may help reveal why parts of this practice are open to change as we move past the traditional catalogs to more specific and localized approaches to documenting and narrating objects and history.

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DECOLONIAL APPROACHES TO CATALOGING HISTORY

Libraries, archives, and museums are often seen to present knowledge in ways that exclude minority populations. Critically reflecting on this practice, and revealing how the documents that structure these organizations produce knowledge, is crucial.[12] Arguably, they continue to misrepresent how these peoples, for example Indigenous communities, wish to describe and search for their heritage. For this reason, recently, a decolonizing approach to library and archival cataloging terms and standards has begun to take shape in the literature.[13] While decolonial research strategies generally explicitly aim to foreground the contributions of Indigenous peoples to center the Indigenous experience,[14] a full and critical history of museum documentation is helpful to uncover how museum standards of description were normalized in museum practice.

Understanding how knowledge organization schemes can marginalize is pertinent, but it is also important to recognize that they can be constructively changed to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing. Ann Doyle has recently suggested that approaching knowledge organization in a culturally relevant way can help to build capacities in Indigenous communities and build bridges between different knowledge communities and increase mutual understanding.[15] A first step to achieve more culturally appropriate knowledge organization systems is to document the history of and to highlight the changes through time that occur in classification schemes. In Jonathan Furner's account of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and classification, the Dewey Decimal System (DDC) is seen to be "characterized by a pervasive set of power relations" that enforces a system of knowledge, which is "institutional, systemic,

structural, everyday, and everywhere."[16] It is seen to be a system of organization that is both descriptive and prescriptive, which projects specific worldviews.[17] Furner argues that the utility of CRT approaches to "de-racializing" classification schemes lies in their ability to demonstrate the historical significances of changes in terminologies and subjects through time, and identify the issues that these changes raise.[18] As CRT suggests, distinctive worldviews can be uncovered by examining the normalized system of bias that classifies the material, and Furner furthers this by suggesting that "subject ontogenies," or histories of how categories change through time, can be a useful step forward in understanding these historical biases.[19]

Individual museum catalogs, like other systems that standardize and classify knowledges, operate using their own "distinctive worldviews," yet uncovering the history of these is difficult. This is due to the complexities of museum classification schemes and nomenclatures, and the fact that most museums do not have standard vocabularies or classification schemes like the DDC. Despite this, there are still widespread and lasting ways in which the naming and classifying of Indigenous material heritage in museums can be read as problematic.[20] For this reason, I argue a historical approach should be adopted when considering the decolonization of colonial cataloging practices in museums.

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MAPPING A CRITICAL HISTORY OF MUSEUM CATALOGS

Museums are unique among other cultural institutions, as their systems of organization consist of some formal or standard descriptions, but generally rely on ad hoc practices that are specific to each museum.[21] Further, these naming and organization practices have varied through time and vary significantly between each institution. Why is this? In part, because it would be impossible to catalog the plethora and variety of materials often found in one museum—from artworks to paleo-biological specimens—in one system of description. Individual disciplines of study require differing information about these objects, and there are different ways that this information is recorded and preserved. It is therefore common for each department in a single museum to rely on distinct classifications and standards. This makes a study of how museums catalog Indigenous heritage difficult, as these practices of description are contextual to a time period and an institution. Further, museums that hold Indigenous material heritage often use what are best termed "nomenclatures" instead of "standards" or strict classification schemes.[22] Simply put, no two museums are alike in their classification of Indigenous heritage. Nomenclatures and naming practices are therefore deeply connected to the history and development of each individual institution.

Much of the literature that maps museum documentation has focused on the practical applications of naming standards, and has sought to address issues faced when striving for data interoperability and metadata schemes.[23] In particular, David Bearman's work has examined digitization issues in museums, and he has critiqued the information concepts that structure collections in the archive.[24] However, relatively little has focused on the historical underpinnings of these systems.[25] In light of this, the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology at the NMNH is an important case study to examine the historical roots of cataloging Indigenous material heritage. Previously known as the United States National Museum (USNM), it was the first government museum of its kind in North America. Through government exploring expeditions, the Smithsonian was engaged in collecting objects of Indigenous material heritage throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.[26] Today, the museum is also actively seeking ways to respond to contemporary issues with cross-cultural knowledge exchange in a digital world, making an examination of its historical practices timely and necessary.[27]

At the NMNH, I argue that the history of documentation begins with the development of collecting guides, or "field guides" distributed by the institution throughout its existence. These guides, published by the Smithsonian as "circulars," detailed the kinds of evidence and information that were to be gathered about objects in the field in the mid-1800s.[28] These objects, and their associated information, were recorded in large ledger books as a way to trace accessions and begin assigning numbers to the entire collection. These guides were possibly the first way that material culture was organized prior to cataloging, as they included category lists of objects to be collected, as well as lists of the kinds of information to be recorded about the objects. Indigenous material heritage was originally organized like other natural history collections at the museum, and this allowed objects to be studied as valuable "specimens" under the guise of good science.

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DATA AND VALUE IN THE HISTORY OF COLLECTING AT THE NMNH

> Each step—field collection, proper labeling, archival systematization, and museum display—was apparently linked to the prior step, ensuring the authenticity and stabilizing the meanings of ethnographic collections.[29]

As Jenkins argues, the keeping of records about objects in the Anthropology department at the NMNH has a long history that originates with the collection of field data and the recording of this data in ledger books in the middle of the nineteenth century. Jenkins also argues that through these actions, ethnographic collections came to have stabilized meanings. The creation of

standards for object documentation are therefore key indicators that show how ethnographic objectivity was constructed, and how value was attributed to objects collected in the field.

In the mid-eighteenth century, formal procedures for accessioning and cataloging had not yet been established, but the staff at the Smithsonian were actively engaged in figuring out ways to ameliorate what they saw as an unorganized and undocumented collection.[30] Prior to the establishment of a national museum in Washington, DC, the Smithsonian had existed as a scientific institute dedicated to the public dissemination of knowledge. Until 1858, it was without a formal collection of objects, at which time it acquired collections from the U.S. Government Patent Office.[31] In 1881, the USNM was founded and the first attempts at unpacking boxes, ordering, and organizing a largely disorganized collection of objects began.

Throughout the mid and late nineteenth century, new objects came in to the collection as a result of U.S. government surveys and expeditions, and staff at the museum struggled to deal with the influx of material culture. In order to conduct ethnographic and scientific research at the time, researchers relied heavily on the associated information that came in with the objects through the collector's field catalogs and notes, and the staff needed to order and rigorously detail this information in the museum's ledger books.[32] Many of the objects that became the anthropological and archaeological collections at the NMNH, what Nancy Parezo has called the "systematic" anthropological collections,[33] were, for the most part, not haphazardly chosen, but collected because they already fit into a complex system of categorization that prescribed what kinds of objects should be valued, preserved, and named.[34]

Therefore, although the collection of objects was essential, as James Urry has argued in his discussion of other similar collecting practices, the collection of ethnographic material was also first and foremost a systematic collection of field data.[35] As Otis Mason, an active figure in the Department of Anthropology at the turn of the nineteenth century said, "under the secure guidance of things well authenticated even rubbish will become useful."[36] This data was frequently collected and authenticated by non-experts, like navy personnel or geologists who collected information and objects in the field. In order to obtain good data, they established lists of desired characteristics. This allowed the museum to obtain basic documentation. Without this, objects were of little or no research value and they were seen as curiosities only.[37] Nancy Parezo notes that the Smithsonian's emphasis on systematic documentation was a rule for researchers and collectors and they functioned as standards by which collections were amassed. She argues that these documentation practices were equally as important as the objects, and the objects that had good documentation increased in scientific value.[38] For example, the preponderance and necessity of the fields "locality" and "collector" are desired by each of the early field guides, and the locality in particular was one of the most important pieces of information to attribute to specimens.

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Notably, when the hunt for relics became a business in the late nineteenth century, vandals were extremely careful to create catalogs and provide locality information for collections because they knew that it would increase the value of the specimen—even in the absence of the original information.[39] Good specimens were objects that came with good information—and it was the collector's job to provide it.

POSITIVE DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED: COLLECTING GUIDES AND "GOOD" INFORMATION

The establishment of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) in 1879 at the Smithsonian brought about intensified, formalized studies of North American Indigenous peoples[40] and the new division of Anthropology was officially created in the USNM by 1883.[41] At the time the Smithsonian was actively engaged in collecting objects, there may have been awareness that a collection of everything would be impossible. The scientific practice would need to rely on non-specialist explorers or even citizens to make decisions about what kind of objects were valuable or important.[42] The Smithsonian therefore published "circulars," which were used to enable travelers or other inexperienced collectors to identify and obtain objects. The circulars, or field guides therefore specified the "*Desiderata*" (Latin for "desired things"), and these were published as lists in small booklets or the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Publications.[43] As the budding science of anthropology began to develop its methods, other circulars were written, some that specifically listed the objects required of specific expositions.[44] Although these did not determine haphazard or unsolicited collections, they did direct naval officers and explorers (and in some cases even the public)[45] to collect certain kinds of objects and information. Instructions were also given on how to collect and preserve specimens in the field, and they noted what kinds of information were deemed necessary to record about them.[46] For example, lists of documentary evidence were to be provided such as where the object was found, a unique number, the use, the name, the collector and in some cases the tribal affiliation.[47]

The kinds of documentation required also changed through time. In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, examples of objects that were considered desirable for the institution most commonly included skulls and skeletons of individuals of Indigenous origin. The distribution of circulars to obtain knowledge and objects for natural history specimens was common, and the first possible circular attributed to ethnographic material was published in 1848, written by Spencer Baird.[48] Baird was secretary at the institution at the time, and an avid naturalist and ornithologist who was dedicated to the serious study of nature.[49] His field guide described a method to

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collect and prepare specimens, which also indicated objects that were "desirable" for the institution to acquire. However, Baird only provides cursory instructions as to what should be collected. His notion of what constitutes an ethnographic specimen was weakly defined, and included objects such as "stone implements and "industrial products of present tribes."[50] The more pressing collections were the actual bodies of Indigenous people, often collected with little context or associated information. However, when the focus shifted toward the collection of material culture, the importance of collecting information and objects from Indigenous groups was seen as a way to safeguard these objects before the people themselves had disappeared.[51]

The guides also focus on acquiring good, rigorous documentation. For example, the guide, "Instructions for Research Relative to the Ethnology and Philology of America" published in 1863 by George Gibbs, was designed to solicit information and occasionally objects collected by "officers of the US government, travellers, or residents."[52] It served as an instruction manual on how to collect proper information, on how to properly inquire about the state and nature of the communities under question. At this time, paying attention to the "pure facts" and accurate information was paramount—yet there was little emphasis on acquiring these facts from the makers of the objects themselves. For example, the "feelings of a low grade of culture" were to be avoided, as they did not further the discipline of science as a whole.[53] Indigenous thought was seen to be unreliable and untrustworthy, and it was important that the collector include independent testimony of more than one individual.[54] This positions the material culture of ethnographic research as having inherent scientific meaning, and in which all subjective voice should be removed in favor of more "accurate" descriptions. The ramification of this is the paucity of Indigenous voices due to the fact that Indigenous people's knowledges were seen as fundamentally different and inferior. George Gibbs notes in his guide that the nature of knowledge found within Indigenous communities was intrinsically different:

> The character of the indian mind is so essentially different form that of the white man, they think in so different a manner, that many precautions are necessary to avoid giving them wrong impressions of our meaning, and of course obtaining incorrect replies.[55]

The collecting guides also made it possible for collectors who were non-experts in the field to work on behalf of the Smithsonian, acquire the desired objects, and preserve them at a scientific standard that the museum saw fit. As is evidenced above, this is a standard that actively ignored information from the originating communities, part of a ubiquitous system of discrimination at the time.

As museum processes formalized near the end of the nineteenth century, the later collecting guides show an emphasis on the importance of good

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information in the practice of collecting for museums. As Joseph Henry wrote, "all such objects should be accompanied by accurate information, when procurable, of the tribe, locality, date, native name, and uses of the same, as well as name of collector."[56] Good documentation is consistently considered to be the most important aspect, not just to museum practice but also to Anthropology as a whole. The documentation provided by collectors would then be the authoritative file on the object's history. For example, another later collecting guide notes that the original documentation would serve as the foundational information for all other publications: "The specimens form the cabinet, the pictures give life to the specimens and show them in their true environment, and the descriptions form the basis of all labels and of the literature of anthropology."[57] How this information was acquired is occasionally unclear, but it is clear that field collectors were to acquire "a full history of the object in as few words as possible,"[58] and that collectors served a fundamental role in the telling of those histories.

Field guides also expanded to include various lists of types of material culture that was deemed useful to the collection, and the field guide published by Otis Mason in 1875, entitled the "Ethnological Directives Relative to the Indians of the United States of America,"[59] is an example of this. In it, Mason specifies the objects desired for collection be categorized by "type." These were organized in functional groups, such as "means of subsistence," "habitations," "vessels and utensils," "implements of general use," and "means of locomotion"— out of 17 classes in total.[60] His object categories were designed from a functional taxonomic perspective[61] and worked so that the museum could collect objects from all parts of the globe that fit within those same defined categories in use among ethnologists. Mason's ultimate goal was to design a "classified report" of all of the material in line with these kinds of ethnological categories, which he defines as: "function, geographical distribution, degree of elaboration, material, and classes of investigation."[62] As Catherine Nichols has recently argued, this was part of Mason's collecting bias, and this was situated in natural history approaches to understanding Indigenous culture.[63] Mason's personal interests, particularly in throwing sticks, organized the guide as well. For example, there are eight different sub-classifications of hand-held weaponry items, and only two sub-classifications of "art."[64]

As I have shown in the previous section, object descriptions were seen as adding to the "Ethnological value" of the objects; rendering them full, scientifically examinable specimens. However, it was the associated documentation, the names, location, use, date, and number of pieces collected, which increased the value of the objects as specimens. It was considered particularly useful to attribute proper locality to the object. As Mason noted, the locality was important because it put the curators or researchers "into immediate relations with the collectors,"[65] those who were considered to be

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the most important sources of information. These standards for documentation changed near the turn of the century, and tribal affiliation, or what becomes known as the "People" category, becomes a more important designator in the making of a good specimen. This is made explicit in a guide amended in 1902, by Otis Mason and William Henry Holmes.[66] Mason notes that without such affiliations, the object would remain a "mere curiosity," and that objects in museums lacking this information also lost their value.[67] Even still, the outcome of this is a biased system where locality and donor or collector are more regularly recorded categories than maker, which has resulted in a lack of this kind of information in contemporary records. Indigenous makers were unnamed, and the objects were seen to come from the tribe as a whole, effacing individual artists and named individuals. The guides urge collectors to fully understand the environment in which the object was found,[68] to ensure the connection between collector and object remained.

Interestingly, in some cases even the novice collectors were seen as untrustworthy. Mason recommends that they should be wary about relying too heavily on their own judgment, assuming that the collectors did not have the "scrupulous adherence to truth" that was required of Smithsonian scientific research.[69] Good documentation therefore avoided problems of false or lacking information. When objects were named carefully and methodologically, collectors could avoid the problem of scrutability. Observations could then be systematically organized in the ledger books, a way to standardize the field notes into mutable records of knowledge, without input from any originating community. These ledgers became the ultimate record of the object and the first source of information about it.

PRESERVING INFORMATION: LEDGER BOOKS AND HEADINGS

How was the data collected from the field recorded, and how did the information recorded become part of museum practice? The information collected about objects became part of the legacy of collections information in the NMNH through the inscription of object information in the ledger registration books. These large volumes comprised the bureaucratic administrative system of the collections, a way to keep track of incoming objects, and note the collectors who gave them. The ledger books predate the existence of what many museum scholars would recognize as a formal cataloging system, yet they show the historical emphasis on using ethnographic objects as evidence in the study of human beings within the paradigm of the natural sciences. For instance, the first Anthropology ledgers (c.1859) have fifteen headings or data entry points: *current number, original number, name, sex, locality, station, nature of object, when collected, measurement, collected by, prepared by, cost, when entered, No. [number] of specimens,* and *remarks*. The

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use of the "sex" column demonstrates that likely these categories were not only modeled on natural history paradigms and information requirements, but are direct replicas or copies of other ledgers already in use at the time in the USNM.[70]

The ledgers also privileged certain kinds of information above others because of the way they were organized. The field "collector" for example, was almost always populated with information in the ledgers, as the museum often exchanged payment by acknowledgment or by giving other specimens to the person who collected the object,[71] whereas "Tribe" was often a neglected field. It was also useful for researchers to know who the collector was so that they could refer back to them as a source of authority on the history of the object. Accessions came to represent the collections of a specific collector on a specific date in time, and therefore collectors eventually became the primary way the collection was organized. When the card catalog was created from the information on the ledgers in the early 1900s, the accession numbers were used to organize the catalog, and searching by accession and collector was the only way to access information about the objects. This was the dominant mode of collections organization at the turn of the century.

Ledger headings changed through time, and changes were often handwritten to reflect the kinds of information and evidence required of ethnographic specimens. In 1867, the fifteen categories were maintained, but "station" (which presumably meant "field station" at the time) was excluded, as well as the field "prepared by." These terms, or methods of description, either fell out of use or were consciously excluded in lieu of other categories: like "corresponding number" and "received from." For example, the field "prepared by" was dropped in favor of more common practices in ethnographic collecting where specimens did not necessarily need preparations in the same way that other biological or natural history specimens did. By 1899, the categories in the ledgers were modified again, and the number of columns was reduced to twelve. Ledgers now contained tables for: *Museum number, accession number, original number, name, people, locality, how acquired, measurement, referred to, when entered, number of specimens,* and *remarks*.

These ledgers show a reduction in the categories of contextual, site-specific information, which arguably allowed for the (unintentional) loss of data for the objects catalogued during that time period. The 1899 version of the ledger system represents a simplified, more anthropological approach to understanding and documenting objects. "Accession Number" appeared as a category, not the ambiguous "corresponding number of" in the previous system. Further, the field "museum number" was also used in place of the previous "current number." These changes are perhaps explained by Otis Mason's involvement as an active figure in the department.[72] Although there is no direct reference in the archives to the creation of these ledger headings,

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it can be assumed that due to his general frustration at the state of collections documentation, he played an important role in their creation. Additional categories were later added that were likely more useful for an anthropology department; including "people," "how acquired," and "referred to." It is also likely that the previous categories of "when collected, nature of object, collected by, received from and cost" were condensed into the "how acquired" column. By 1899, "When collected" likely became the column "when entered," and arguably an important piece of documentary evidence was lost in this transition. The date of collection was written out of the history of the object—a reduction of the objects' origins to their date when they were cataloged in the museum, a reconfirmation of the notion that these objects are objects of value and evidence only once they enter the collection and become useful for scholarship.[73]

The collection and inscription of data about objects can thus be read as an early attempt at creating a standardized repository of North American Indigenous material heritage. Organizing information in the ledgers enabled this knowledge about objects to become fixed, and readymade for researchers to extract and use the information in scientific publications. This distilled "essentialized" characteristics of complex and multivocal material heritage objects into proper names on labels not unlike the lithographs or two-dimensional drawings created to record other kinds of scientific objects.[74] Further, as Jenkins argues, it was, "not only the application of proper labels but also the ability to produce optically consistent images [that] became a criterion of ethnographic objectivity."[75] In this case, the early objectivity of ethnography was historically mediated by the concerns of natural history, and the ethnographic specimens were created through the process of taking specific sets of information that were then used in order to consistently compare similarities across all objects. For Otis Mason, collecting and recording simplistic "object types" allowed for the cross-examination of ethnographic objects that in turn was useful for a functionalist evolutionary analysis.[76] In this typological tradition, meaning was intrinsically apparent in the object once placed in a series. Missing pieces or irregular specimens were to be avoided, and Mason even notes that as many objects as possible should be collected to avoid reliance on a single, possible "peculiarit[y]."[77]

ORIGINS OF A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH?

It has been argued that this collection of artifacts from this period (1875–1920) played a significant role in the professionalization of anthropology as a discipline, and the collection of these objects was not peripheral to the documentation of the culture itself.[78] As I have argued, documentation, or data, was important to connect with the objects, and "positive documentation"

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was required to establish scientifically valuable collections. In part, this was done to functionally organize the growing collection of objects, but it also represents the epistemological tendencies that situated the knowledge of Indigenous peoples outside of the official record.

The collecting guides and the ledger books contributed to the development of a systematic, and systemic, approach to understanding Indigenous peoples. Nancy Parezo argues that a "sampling procedure" is generally unacknowledged when it comes to thinking historically about the formation of an ethnographic collection.[79] Understanding these procedures are key, she argues, and come to form or construct the ethnographic object as it moves from accession to catalog to storeroom or transfer.[80] As this article has shown, the collection guides and ledgers at the NMNH show the development of a systematic approach to collections documentation, and they were a key step in the formalization of the study of Indigenous material heritage. The site of collection was a highly mediated site, the collectors were charged with attributing value to objects in the field by including or not including, "accurate" information. Once an object was cataloged in the ledger book it could be transported, distributed, and compared. At the time of the first entry in the ethnological ledgers, in 1859, these volumes contained the basic information that was needed for what was considered to be proper contextualization of the entire collection. When collected, objects became important as evidence for scientific research—they became ethnographic specimens. Proper documentation was of utmost importance. Keeping good records of the objects provided a system whereby objects could be retrieved and used as mobile objects of knowledge, where previously they were kept unsorted in the basement of the museum. Without good documentation, and without proper classification within a system, the objects could not be used as evidence in scientific research.

Meticulously cataloging the objects would also make it possible for the museum to disseminate information or knowledge about objects. The classification of objects as duplicate specimens was also an important way this was achieved.[81] Shipping objects that were considered "duplicated" or "copied" objects around the world to other museums served to create an understanding of the anthropological subject as well as the method of inquiries. As Catherine Nichols has recently argued, the processing of museum collections allowed these objects to be read as specimens, and this enabled certain objects to be considered copies of others, and made a mass redistribution of ethnographic type specimens possible.[82] Individual objects, therefore, became read as signs within a larger system. By categorizing objects as duplicates within the catalog, the objects could be distributed and items were permanently exchanged with other museums, thus increasing their scientific value. Without a systematic way of recording and storing this information and then being able to reference it, a system of exchanges and loans would have been difficult, if not impossible.

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This analysis shows that what was considered to be "good" documentation took shape in the mid to late nineteenth century, and that during this time norms of ethnographic objectivity were established. Through the use of collecting guides to distinguish appropriate specimens in the field, to their inclusion in ledger books, the value of these objects was in their description and situation within the collection. In this way, early object descriptions were perhaps more important than the objects themselves. At the NMNH, what originated with the collection of natural history specimens likely became used as the model for the collection of ethnographic specimens. Due to the wide reach of the scientific work produced by the museum, the practice of identifying "Desiderata" and recording specific characteristics about them was a key process in the formation of anthropological knowledge more broadly.

Strategies for validating objects by collector and collection event, and the new administrative practices that developed out of this time, became normalized categories for ethnographers and anthropologists. As Ruth Phillips has argued, for ethnographic museums that hold Indigenous material heritage, there is an "intimate connection between naming and power,"[83] and the power to name objects and individuals is an example of this. There is a paucity of Indigenous voice in the description of material heritage due to the early collecting and cataloging practices in museums. The power of the museum thus began to be exercised through the naming and classification of these objects and by the development of normative standards of evidence to evaluate the value of Indigenous cultural heritage. More recent attempts at postcolonial museum practice have sought to reincorporate Indigenous narratives and voice into the museum catalog. However, as Krmpotich and Peers have recently argued, these attempts fall short of the true goal of decolonial practice because Indigenous voice is often included in the narrative or descriptions of catalog records, but not in the way that the records themselves are organized. In this way, they argue, Indigenous taxonomies remain outside the system, just as they often were when the objects were first collected.[84]

There is some evidence of this practice in the history of the catalogs at the NMNH, and these systems were not designed to have multiple views or alternate classificatory systems exist alongside each other. These biases became part of the daily task of museum workers through their inscription in ledger books and eventually card catalogs. The outcome of this is a system where locality and collector are more important and regularly used categories than tribe or maker, which has often resulted in a lack of this kind of information in contemporary records. The early guides to collecting objects in the field and the system of ledger books to record information were both mechanisms that enabled collectors and museum workers to establish the kinds objects appropriate for collection, and those which fit into existing categories of knowledge. As I have shown, the mid

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced an ethnographic documentation standard so that when Indigenous heritage was collected and recorded, Indigenous knowledge was actively excluded due to its perceived untrustworthiness as it was measured against the Eurocentric standard of scientific research where the collector was seen as the authoritative voice.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented a brief overview of the history of the early collecting and cataloging practices at the NMNH, in an attempt to make visible the first practices of standardizing Indigenous material heritage as manifest in the early guides to collecting and the ledger books. What does this analysis tell us, particularly for museum practitioners who encounter and use the catalogs regularly? First, it shows that the categories of object description, although rigorous, are also culturally constructed and historically located. Second, it shows that they were created to house information about collections from a worldview in Western science, and were ordered primarily by specific individuals at specific points in time. These categories were then maintained through the practice of recording and copying of information in material documentation. Museums have become contentious and even harmful places for Indigenous peoples, and these communities have actively sought to retrieve and reconnect with lost objects and lost knowledge. A decolonial approach calls into question the seemingly stable and unchangeable museum categories and knowledge organization. As access to the "data" of museums for source communities is now increasingly given, showing how these normalized practices present in museum recording systems were born is important to understand if, and how, they can change.

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NOTES

1. For important work in this area see: Michael Ames, "How to Decorate a House: The Renegotiation of Cultural Representations at the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology," *Museum Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (1999), 32–44; Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers, eds., *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Alice Feldman, "Making Space at the Nations' Table: Mapping the Transformative Geographies of the International Indigenous Peoples' Movement," *Social Movement Studies* 1, no. 1 (2002), 31–46.

2. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Who Stole Native American Studies?" *WICAZO SA Review* 12, no. 1 (1997), 9–28; Gloria Cranmer Webster, "From Colonization to Repatriation," in *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives,* ed. Gerald McMaster and Lee Ann Martin (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992); Paul Tapsell, *Taonga: A Tribal Response to Museums* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1998); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2006); Martin Nakata, "Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines," (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

3. Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

4. For a recent discussion, see: Cara Krmpotich and Laura Peers, *This Is Our Life: Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museum Practice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 246–251.

5. Ann Doyle, "Naming, Claiming, and (Re)creating: Indigenous Knowledge Organization at the Cultural Interface" (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2013); Deborah Lee, "Indigenous Knowledge Organization: A Study of Concepts, Terminology, Structure and (Mostly) Indigenous Voices," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 6, no. 1 (July 3, 2011); Hope A. Olson, "Mapping beyond Dewey's Boundaries: Constructing Classificatory Space for Marginalized Knowledge Domains," *Library Trends,* 47, no. 2 (1998), 233–234; Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Richard Thomas, *The Imperial Archive* (London: Verso Press, 1993).

6. Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1999); James Opp, "The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: The Arnold Lupson Photographic collection," *Archivaria* 65 (2008).

7. Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal and Kingston:McGill-Queens University Press, 2011), 95.

8. Doyle, "Naming, Claiming, and (Re)creating."

9. Kimberly Christen, "Archival Challenges and Digital Solutions in Aboriginal Australia," *SAA Archaeological Record,* 8, no. 2 (2008), 21–24; The Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC), "GRASAC," https://grasac.org/ (accessed March 29, 2015); Haidy Geismar and William Mohns, "Social Relationships and Digital Relationships: Rethinking the Database at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011), S133–S155, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2011.01693.x; Kate Hennessy and Lisa P. Nathan, "Honoring Protocol: Design By, for and with Aboriginal Peoples," in *Proceedings of the 2014 Companion Publication on Designing Interactive Systems* (2014), 1–3, doi:10.1145/2598784.2611381; The Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), "About the RRN," http://www.rrncommunity.org/pages/about (accessed March 29, 2015).

10. This institution was chosen because it is one of the first public museums in North America, and because of the well-documented influence the Smithsonian held over the development of American Anthropology and museum practice in general. For more on this history, see Curtis M. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981); Neil Merton Judd, *The Bureau of American Ethnology: A Partial History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967); Catherine Nichols, "Museum Networks The Exchange of the Smithsonian Institution's Duplicate Anthropology Collections" (PhD Thesis, Arizona State University, 2014), Proquest, 3622443; Nancy J. Parezo, "The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The Smithsonian Institution in the American Southwest," *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 10 (1987).

11. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 21.

12. Ann Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 90.

13. For recent work, see: Ann Doyle, "Naming, Claiming, and (Re)creating: Indigenous Knowledge Organization at the Cultural Interface"; Deborah Lee, "Indigenous Knowledge Organization."

14. Martin Nakata, Victoria Nakata, Sarah Keech, and Reuben Bolt, "Decolonial Goals and Pedagogies for Indigenous Studies," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 120–140; Heather Ritenburg, Alannah Earl Young Leon, Warren Linds, Denise Marie Nadeau, Linda M. Goulet, Margaret Kovach, and Mary Marshal, "Embodying Decolonization: Methodologies and Indigenization," *Alternative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 10, no. 1 (2014): 67–80; Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

15. Ann M. Doyle, "Naming and Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledges in Public Institutions: Intersections of Landscapes and Experience," *Knowledge Organization for a Global Learning Society: Proceedings of the 9th International Conference for Knowledge Organization* (Vienna, Austria), *Advances in Knowledge Organization* 10 (2006), 2, http://hdl.handle.net/10150/105581

16. Jonathan Furner, "Dewey Deracialized: A Critical Race-Theoretic Perspective," *Knowledge Organization* 34, no. 3 (2007): 144–168.

17. Ibid., 3

18. Ibid., 26.

19. Joseph Tennis, "Subject Ontogeny: Subject Access Through Time and the Dimensionality of Classification," *Advances in Knowledge Organization* 8 (2002): 54–59.

20. Joshua A. Bell, Kimberly Christen and Mark Turin, "Introduction: After the Return," *Museum Anthropology Review* 7, nos. 1–2 (2013), 1–21.

21. Ross Parry, *Recoding the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); see Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star, eds., *Standards and Their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2009) for a discussion of ad hoc standards.

22. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, "How Things (Actor-Net) Work: Classification, Magic and the Ubiquity of Standards," *Philosophia* 25, nos. 3–4 (1996): 195–220.

23. David Bearman and John Perkins, "Standards Framework for the Computer Interchange of Museum Information" (1999), http://cool.conservation-us.org/byorg/cimi/cimifram.html; Robert Chenhall and Peter Homulos, "Propositions for the Future: Museum Data Standards," *Museum International,* 30, nos. 3–4 (1978), 205–212; Mary W. Elings and Gunter Waibel, "Metadata for All: Descriptive Standards and Metadata Sharing across Libraries, Archives and Museums," *First Monday* 12, no. 3 (2007), http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v12i3.1628; Paul F. Marty, "The Changing Nature of Information Work in Museums," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 1 (2007), 97–107, doi:10.1002/asi.20443

24. Bearman and Perkins, "Standards Framework for the Computer Interchange of Museum Information"; David Bearman et al., "Social Terminology Enhancement through Vernacular Engagement: Exploring Collaborative Annotation to Encourage Interaction with Museum Collections," *D-Lib Magazine* 11, no. 9 (2005): 200.

25. Some notable works include: David Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 2 (1994), 242–270; James Opp, "The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive."

26. Nancy J. Parezo, "The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The Smithsonian Institution in the American Southwest," *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 10 (1987): 3.

27. For example, see the recent collaborative 3D digitization project: Eric Hollinger, Edwell John, Jr., Harold Jacobs, Lora Moran-Collins, Carolyn Thome, Jonathan Zastrow, Adam Metallo, Gunter Waibel, and Vince Rossi, "Tlingit-Smithsonian Collaborations with 3D Digitization of Cultural Objects," *Museum Anthropology Review* 7, nos. 1–2 (2013): 201–253.

28. Frank H. H. Roberts, "One Hundred Years of Smithsonian Anthropology," *Science*, New Series 104, no. 2693 (1946): 119–125.

29. Jenkins, "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays," 255.

30. As curator Otis Mason noted in his diary from this time, the collection "could hardly be in worse confusion." Dairy of Otis T. Mason, July 1884–May 1891, The Papers of Otis Tufton Mason, National Anthropological Archives, Manuscript, Anthrop., Hist. Of, 49033, 1.

31. The Patent Office, organized by the National Institute, contained the early collections from the US Exploring Expedition of Ltd. Wilkes from 1838–1842.

32. These are termed the ledger books today, but prior to the creation of a systematic indexed card catalog, these were known simply as the museum's catalog books, as is evident in the Smithsonian Institution Annual Reports. Smithsonian Institution et al., *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1889), 8–13.

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33. Nancy J. Parezo, "The Formation of Ethnographic Collections: The Smithsonian Institution in the American Southwest," *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 10 (1987), 3.

34. As is quoted in an early report on the development of the collections: "In the years between 1843 and 1881 collections reflecting the broadness of [Baird's] conceptions flowed into the institution in a constant stream, and individuals throughout the United States and other countries were working to build a museum in which everything that has a name should have a place." Series 17, Division of Ethnology, Manuscript And Pamphlet file, Anthropology Manuscripts, Box 2, Folder 21, 21, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, Washington, DC.

35. James Urry, "'Notes and Queries on Anthropology' and the Development of Field Methods in British Anthropology, 1870–1920," *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1972 (1972): 45.

36. Otis Mason, Department of Anthropology, Annual Report, 1884–1885, RU00158, Curators Annual Reports, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 3:4.

37. Jane Walsh, "Collections as Currency," *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge* 44 (2002): 201.

38. Nancy J. Parezo, "Cushing as Part of the Team: The Collecting Activities of the Smithsonian Institution," *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 4 (1985), 765, doi:10.1525/ae.1985.12.4.02a00120.

39. Smithsonian Institution et al., *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1901), 365.

40. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists*, 151.

41. Material collected by the BAE was usually transferred directly to the USNM until the two departments merged in 1965.

42. Roberts, *One Hundred Years of Smithsonian Anthropology*, 120.

43. Smithsonian Institution et al., *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1854), 79.

44. For example, the guide published by Otis Mason, then curator at the Smithsonian: Otis Mason, "Ethnological Directives relative to the Indians of the United States of America" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1875).

45. Joseph Henry, "Circular in Reference to American Archaeology," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Publications*, No. 316, 1878, RU00058, Collected Letters on Ethnology, 1876–1879, 1:1, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC.

46. Otis Mason, "Draft of Manuscript on Development of Anthropology," National Anthropological Archive.

47. The first mention found of these in the annual reports are for the year 1854; however, the collection of other desiderata are also referenced in Spencer Baird's "General Directions for Collecting and preserving objects of Natural history" (1848) and in "Circular no. 1: Indian Languages of North America, June" (1842), Smithsonian Institution Chief Clerk, Forms, Circulars, Announcements, RU00065, 1846–1933, box 1, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC.

48. Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Reports 1851*, 25.

49. Hinsley, *Savages and Scientists,* 39.

50. Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Reports 1851*, 25.

51. Later, several other circulars were published as well: George Gibb's "Instructions relative to the Ethnology and Philology of America" in 1863; Joseph Henry's " Circular Relating to collections in Archaeology and Ethnology" in 1869; Otis Masons' well-known "Ethnological Directives Relative to the Indians of the United States of America"; Joseph Henry's "Circular Relating to Collections in Archaeology and Ethnology" in 1867, and what is known as "Circular 316: Circular in Reference to American Archaeology" published in 1878. Later examples include those published by Charles Rau, Cyrus Thomas, and the "Instructions to Collectors of Historical and Anthropological Specimens," written by William Henry Holmes and Otis Mason in 1902.

52. Gibbs, "Instructions Relative to the Ethnology and Philology," 1.

53. Mason, "Ethnological Directives," 4.

54. Gibbs "Instructions Relative to the Ethnology and Philology of America," 8.

55. Ibid., 14.

56. Henry, "Circular Relating to Collections in Archaeology and Ethnology," 2.

57. Henry Holmes and Otis Mason, "Instructions to Collectors of Historical and Anthropological Specimens," 4.

58. Mason "Ethnological Directives," 3–4.

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59. Ibid., 3.

60. Ibid., 11–13.

61. This is a well-documented position. For more on Mason's perspective in the history of Anthropology see Hinsley, "Savages and Scientists" and Otis T. Mason, "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart," *Science*, no. 226 (1887): 534–535.

62. Otis Mason, Department of Anthropology, Annual Report, 1884–1885, RU00158, Curators Annual Reports, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 3:4.

63. Nichols, "Museum Networks," 120.

64. Mason, "Ethnological Directives," 11–13.

65. Otis Mason, Department of Anthropology, Annual Report, 1905–1906, RU00158, Curator's Annual Reports, Smithsonian Institution Archives, 2:26.

66. Holmes and Mason "Instructions to collectors of Historical and Anthropological Specimens."

67. Otis Mason, "Curator's Annual Reports," 1905–1906.

68. Gibbs, "Instructions Relative to the Ethnology and Philology of America," 6; Mason "Ethnological Directives Relative to the Indians of the United States of America," 4.

69. Mason, "Ethnological Directives," 3.

70. As is evidenced by drafts of other ledgers found in the draft documentation of these ledgers, Smithsonian institution chief clerk, forms, circulars, announcements, Smithsonian Institution Archives, RU00065, Washington, DC (1846–1933), 2. These show similar ledgers for other departments, mostly natural history; this process is also mentioned in the Annual Report several years earlier: Smithsonian Institution et al., *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution.*, 1857, 50.

71. Henry, "Circular Relating to Collections in Archaeology and Ethnology," 2.

72. Otis Mason, "Diary of Otis Mason," 1.

73. This is also similar to Mason's contention that objects were useful as type specimens only when put into context with other objects from around the world as noted in Otis T. Mason, "The Occurrence of Similar Inventions in Areas Widely Apart," *Science*, no. 226 (1887): 534–535.

74. Jenkins, "Object Lessons," 254.

75. Ibid.

76. Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

77. Mason, "Ethnological Directives," 4.

78. Roberts, *One Hundred Years of Smithsonian Anthropology*, 120.

79. Parezo, *The Formation of Ethnographic Collections*, 3.

80. Ibid., 3.

81. Nichols, "Museum Networks," 48.

82. Ibid., 550.

83. Phillips, *Museum Pieces*, 95.

84. Krmpotich and Peers, *This is Our Life*, 247.

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