

The Archives and Special Collections of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation

In August 1998, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation opened the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, Connecticut, the largest native-owned institution of its kind. A major educational endeavor of the tribe, the museum has permanent exhibits on the prehistory and history of northeastern native peoples, with a particular focus on the history, culture, and changing way of life of the Mashantucket Pequots.

Highlights of the exhibits include a diorama depicting a caribou hunt; a re-created 16th-century village populated with life-cast mannequins; exhibits depicting Pequot life after the 1637 massacre of the Mystic village; and the contemporary life of the tribal nation. The Research Center includes a Research Library, the Archives and Special Collections, and a Children's Library, which are open to the public. There are also archeology and conservation laboratories and a 420-seat auditorium for educational programs and performances.

The revival of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe has been a source of curiosity to the local and national community. Many believed that the tribe was extinct; Pequot children heard their teachers tell them so in class. A museum that tells their story has been a goal of the tribe for many years. Theresa H. Bell, Executive Director of the Museum and Research Center, is a tribal member. Her day-to-day involvement in the project assures that the exhibits, programs, and collections are consistent with the tribe's mission for the Museum and Research Center.

The mission of the archives, similar to that of most modern archives, is to appraise, acquire, organize, preserve, and make available the archives of the tribe and to support the inquiries, primary research, and programs of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. In particular, the Archives and Special Collections supports the Museum and Research Center's overall mission to document and reconstruct Native American culture and history.

The archives is the repository for records, manuscripts, printed materials, and other primary resources that document the activities, history, and

culture of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and its members. Materials held by the archives include tribal government records, oral histories and oral history project records, architectural records, photographs, scrapbooks, tribal newspapers and newsletters, clipping files, pamphlets, broadsides, memorabilia, and family and personal papers of tribal members.

The Special Collections encompasses materials that document the histories and cultures of other Native Americans. There are special collections of maps, photographs, manuscripts, ledgers, engravings and woodcuts, research files, professional papers of scholars, popular culture, and other materials that date from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

The primary clientele of the tribal archives are the members of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and tribal employees. However, as a division of the Museum and Research Center, the Archives and Special Collections include as its clientele scholars and the public in the region, the nation, and the world.

The development of the tribal archives' program depends on the support of the Tribal Council. We hope to work with the tribal chairman and the Tribal Council to develop a resolution for the mission of the archives. A tribal resolution will secure a viable mandate for the development of the tribe's archives. The endorsement and support of the chairman and the Tribal Council will be critical to the success of the program.

An archivist depends on the trust and respect of the community to develop a successful archives program. When the archivist is not a member of the community that he serves, then it is particularly important to understand the group's history and culture.

It is my responsibility to learn what the members of the tribal community want for their archives. I must also learn the role of the recent past in shaping contemporary Mashantucket Pequot culture. A contemporary Native American tribe has several major spheres of activity, including the cultural, political, economic, and familial. As an archivist for a tribe, I must be aware of each aspect and try to understand how they have an impact on the collections and mission of archives.

The Museum and Research Center are new tools in the tribal organization. Now that the archives is open to researchers, staff have more opportunities to talk to tribal members and employees about the role of a tribal archives. As we have the opportunity, archives staff describe the types of materials we are collecting and the importance of community and tribal government support. We talk with people about why we collect certain records and special collections materials and how they are used for research.

One special collections purchase provides an interesting example of this educational process. The acquisition was a 17th-century engraving that depicted the execution of Jesuits by Iroquois. The scene includes various torture scenes and executions. A visitor was concerned about the fact that the image depicted Native Americans as violent and savage. To try to answer this question, we talked about the engraving as an interpretation of a documented event and the role of images in communicating information about historical events. We discussed the possibility that this image was perhaps the only information that some 17th-century Europeans had about Native Americans.

From a European perspective, the priests appear to be martyrs and the Iroquois are murderers. Historically, images like this helped to perpetuate the stereotypes of natives as savages; today such images tell us about how some stereotypes may have developed in history. In addition, we talked about the fact that the image does contain real information about Iroquois dress, wampum use, hairstyles, quill work, and post-contact material culture such as iron pots, knives, and axes. Perhaps most importantly, the discussion was an opportunity to talk about the importance of the tribal archives as a place where the tribe can document its history in its own words and images, not those of others.

Another educational goal that sets the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation's archives apart is the priority that we will give to supporting Native American interns. Encouraging internships among tribal members and other Native Americans is one way that the archives can empower its primary constituents, the membership of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, and other Native Americans.

Collections

When it is appropriate, the staff of the archives will work with Tribal Council members to facilitate the transfer of their personal papers to the archives. In our work with the Council, we will use the National Archives and Records Administration's model outlined in "Personal

Papers of Executive Branch Officials."* Federally recognized tribes are sovereign nations that generate records like those generated by any government. We will continue to look to federal, state, and local government records models for direction as we develop the archives. Moreover, we will continue to consult with the staff of other tribal archives to work toward a unified model of tribal archives.

The archives is the repository for a comprehensive oral history collection that was created through an oral history program developed by the tribe. Professional oral historians interviewed members of the tribe. Portions of the audio recordings are incorporated into the museum's exhibits. However, access to the collection itself is currently limited to tribal members.

Family correspondence and papers currently in the collection include letters from a Pequot woman to her daughter. The letters, written in the 1920s, include information on the efforts of Pequot and neighboring tribes to work with the federal government, basket making, and disease.

The Report of the Committee on the Sale of Pequot Land was written by a committee created by the County Court of New London in 1856. **The information contained in the manuscript was a key in the tribe's successful land claim suit in 1976 and its ultimate success in obtaining federal recognition.**

The recent history of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation is vibrant with tribal enterprises, including a pizza restaurant, hydroponics gardens, maple sugar production, and a bingo hall. Records from these enterprises are slowly coming into the archives.

Some manuscripts that document Pequot history are acquired by purchase. Such materials provide valuable insight into life in native communities and often about interactions between natives and non-natives. The types of documents are the same as those collected by most special collection libraries and historical societies. We acquire materials to document social, political, and legal history as well as material culture. One example is a roster of Revolutionary War soldiers from Stonington, Connecticut. The roster includes Pequot names and is accompanied by receipts for goods supplied to each soldier's family. The receipts provide information about individual families and the differences in rations received by natives and non-natives.

Collections are cataloged into Endeavor's *Voyager* system and the Research Library Information Network (RLIN) database. Catalog records and other collection information are avail-

able through the public access catalog in the Research Library and the Archives and Special Collections. Materials in the Archives and Special Collections are being imaged in the in-house photography studio. In the spring of 1999, on-site researchers will be able to view linked images of materials described in the catalog. Researchers will be able to access the catalog through the Web in 1999; however images will remain available on-site only. An illustrated, automated catalog of a collection focused on depictions of Native Americans in popular culture is also available on-site.

Facilities

The Archives and Special Collections facility is on the floor above the Research Library's reading room. Researchers in Archives and Special Collections are accommodated in a reading room that seats eight comfortably. There is a technical services workroom with five workstations for archives staff. Another room is used for new accessions, as a staging area for processing, and supplies storage. The closed stacks include 9,872 linear feet of space on electric compactor cantilever

shelves, the same type that is used in Archives II facility in Suitland, Maryland.

On behalf of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, the staff of the Archives and Special Collections invites you to visit the Museum and Research Center. We look forward to welcoming you.

Note

* Personal Papers of Executive Branch Officials: A Management Guide. National Archives and Records Administration, Management Guide Series. Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, Office of Records Administration, 1992.

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Information about the Museum and Research Center, including hours, is available at www.mashantucket.com.

Preservation Information from the NPS

A *Conserve O Gram* is a short, focused leaflet on the preservation of museum and archival collections published in a series. Updates are issued twice a year. *Conserve O Gram* leaflets are on the Web at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/csd/publications.index.htm> with a range of topics that address preservation problems and questions relating to archival materials. The *Conserve O Gram* series is also available by subscription from the Government Printing Office. Recent preservation topics include:

- 3/7 Monitoring Insect Pest with Sticky Traps
- 3/8 Controlling Insect Pests: Alternatives to Pesticides
- 14/6 Caring for Color Photographs
- 14/7 Caring for Photographs: Special Monochrome Processes
- 14/8 Caring for Cellulose Nitrate Film

Other National Park Service information on the World Wide Web includes:

- the Primer on Disaster Preparedness Management and Response: Paper-based Materials, at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/csd/publications/primer/primerintro.html>.
- a bibliography with a wide range of references containing information about care of archives and archival materials at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/csd/publications/mmpbib1.html>

The *NPS Museum Handbook, Part I* contains in-depth information on care of museum and archival objects. Twelve chapters address different issues in the preventive care of collections with topics such as: Museum Collections Environment, Emergency Planning, and Security and Fire Protection. Care of specific types of materials such as photo collections, cellulose nitrate film, and paper objects are addressed in the appendices.

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