



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), or [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Cultural Sovereignty: Two Northern Cheyenne Ledger-Art Notebooks

Institution: Haskell Indian Nations University

Project Director: Denise Low

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities

NEH FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION:

Awards for Faculty at HBCUs, Institutions with High Hispanic Enrollment, TCUs

“Cultural Sovereignty: Two Northern Cheyenne Ledger-Art Notebooks” DENISE LOW

Research and contribution:

This project will create an online resource of 1879 ledger notebooks with my researched commentary. Wild Hog and six other Cheyenne men, while in a Dodge City jail, recorded their experiences in unique narrative drawings. These indirectly refer to the tragic 1878 Ft. Robinson Breakout conflict. They also depicted other topics, including environmentally descriptive entries. This project annotates the Northern Cheyenne drawings for future scholars. The final product will be an online posting at the Plains Indian Ledger Art Project site (University of California-San Diego) and a manuscript addition to the Kansas State Historical Society Library and Archives. I have discussed this project with Norman Frank of UC-San Diego, director of the PILA project, and with Nancy Sherbert, Curator of Photographs and Special Collections Acquisitions Library/ Archives of the Kansas State Historical Society. I have conferred closely with Ramon Powers, a leading historian and former director of the KSHS. We have co-authored a related article that is now under review.

The Jan. 1, 2011 to July 31, 2001 project contributes primary historic/literary texts from the point-of-view of Cheyenne people.

Ledger images are a mnemonic sign system, where a pipe, for example, indicates not only all the spiritual connotations of prayer, but also it can indicate leadership in war encounters. The seven Northern Cheyenne men who drew these ledgers—Wild Hog, Old Man, Tangle Hair, Crow, Left Hand, Owl, and Noisy Walker—survived terrible loss of women, children, and fellow warriors during their escape from Ft. Robinson. Nonetheless, they were able to win their court case and eventually return to Montana. Their drawings record “survivance,” to use Gerald Vizenor’s term—which is the process of not only surviving but also transforming tragic events. The ledgers imply a heroic recovery from displacement and loss.

The Ft. Robinson Breakout has an accessible body of documentation: United States army records; Cheyenne oral and “as-told-to” accounts; and non-Cheyenne observers and histories. These all support the ledgers’ history. The Dodge City ledgers, available on the Kansas Historical Society website, are unique because of their clear historic provenance.

They also include an unusual amount of environmental information, as indicated by the presence of Plains animals. Scenes include elk, buffalo, blue grouse, turkeys, opossums, and other regional animals. Early non-Cheyenne settlers, like Richard Irving Dodge, confirm the abundance of turkeys, for example, as well as the predominance of elk as a major meat source. These have potential for discussion of ecology and its influence on art forms, culture, and history. Several courtship scenes show romantic encounters, complete with red elk teeth dresses and fine horses. The elk teeth ornaments also reference environmental economies. Like other ledgers of the mid-19th century to early 20th century, the drawings encompass history, literary narratives, and spiritual values. The project will lead researchers and students to other online ledgers about this particular event and the entire era of the “Indian Wars” of the Great Plains.

Ledgers inform scholars of the Cheyenne experience during the transition period to the reservation. Previous scholars, in cooperation with Cheyenne people, have learned to read these texts. The images are drawn on paper, not hide or rock, so hybridity is one of their characteristics. Research into this field demands multiple perspectives. It includes works published by both historians and art historians. Father Peter Powell published two major works about his time interviewing and participating with Cheyenne people from the 1960s to 1980s. Northern Cheyenne also shared their first-hand observations and oral tradition with historians James Mooney, and George Bird Grinnell. Art historians Joyce Szabo, Candace Greene, Karen Petersen, Janet Berlo, and Michael Cowdrey, along with Powell, have explained the individual images as well as a “syntax” of image placement. My research explores interpretation of the ledger images as alternative forms of literacy.

The ledgers are valuable primary sources for researchers and also students, especially those at tribal colleges. Because of suppression of Native scholarship through the early reservation and boarding school eras, few Native primary resources are available for educational purposes. I have often used winter counts in classes at Haskell Indian Nations University, which have been provocative texts for discussion. Especially the Ben Kindle winter count includes events that surprise Native students, such as the multiple waves of diseases that are recorded; the 1833 comets; and the shifting alliances among bands and Nations. In their accounts, Wild Hog and the other

Northern Cheyenne men carefully censored themselves by omitting war scenes. In their place they show hunting and courtship, and then new descriptive emphasis on game animals, outside the context of the hunt. These dispel stereotypes of a romanticized or demonized past and encourage reappraisal of humanities values. The emergence of ledger drawings as an available genre will provide texts that will supplement oral tradition. They are cultural maps of complex resistance and adaptation to change. These provocative ledgers deserve greater exploration by researchers and students alike.

Methods and work plan

Research and review of literature/ledgers (Jan.-March 2011), writing (March-June), editing (July), and posting (August) are the phases of this project.

Research will include travel to Topeka where Wildhog/Northern Cheyenne ledgers are available to view by appointment. Although all 120 or so Kansas Historical Society images are online, the nuances of line, texture, and color are only clear through direct examination. The online images are in sequence, but not laid out to indicate the diptych-like structure of pages that face each other. Scholar Candace Greene has indicated how important the syntax of right-to-left narrative movement in placement of figures, where the right-hand figure engages in the dominant action within the frame.

Another research initiative is to review available sources—primary and secondary; Cheyenne and non-Cheyenne—for contextualization of the events from this time. Because I have worked in the field several years, I have researched many of the non-Cheyenne accounts, as well as the “as-told-to” accounts by Cheyenne men and women who had first-hand knowledge of the Ft. Robinson breakout events. However, there are some authors I would like to review, including Peter Powell. Further, I have not had a chance to study some of the ledgers that reference the same events—Little Fingernail’s ledger, for example. He was killed during the Ft. Robinson breakout, and a soldier took a ledger from his body. That ledger is available at the New York City Natural History Museum. I also would like to travel to Washington, D.C.(March 2011) to see a drawing by Wild Hog that is in the Smithsonian.

Writing goals for a comprehensive commentary will be (1) an introduction to Wild Hog’s group, historic context, and ledger art as a genre; (2) commentary on each Kansas Historical Society image; (3) summary reflection on themes relevant for other researchers and educators. I am committed to providing interpretation to encourage reflection on humanities values, such as those articulated by Deborah Humphreys: “engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring.”

Editing of this commentary will be for both coherence but also online accessibility. A model for online posting of a large project like this is the Plains Indian Ledger Project, specifically Michael Cowdrey’s book *Arrow’s Elk Society Ledger*, posted in its entirety. Part of the editing process will be to ask other scholars in the field to review it. I have a preliminary commitment from (b) (6) . (b) (6) will also review the manuscript.

Competencies, skills, and access

I have research and educational experience to bring to this project. In 1991, while attending a Newberry Library NEH Summer Institute, John Aubrey, the research librarian, showed me the Blackhorse ledger, and I began researching the field for scholarly and curricular goals. My length of time in the field and productivity show that I will finish this grant project within the given time frame.

Since 2001, I have published several articles in the field—for *American Indian Quarterly*, *Studies in American Indian Literature*, and an article in proceedings of a University of Montana event, *Confluence of Cultures Conference Proceedings*. I was gratified at my recent presentation at the native American Literature Symposium, “Lyric and Narrative Modes in Ledger Art,” to find my colleagues were following this research and engaging in it as well.

My research builds on that of historians and art historians, but concerns more a more humanities approach, with consideration of values and cultural experience. Cross-disciplinary study of language, literature, and translation issues of ledgers relate to American Indian/Alaskan Native texts and oral literatures.

As a tribal college faculty member for over 25 years at Haskell, I have taught literature and American Indian & Indigenous Studies classes. Especially in the earlier years, few primary texts were available. I have used ledger art sources as texts in classes such as American Indian Literature; Philosophy in American Indian Literature; American Indian Narratives; and American Indian Literature in Translation.

The advent of electronic sites for full-color displays of ledger art is a welcome development in the field. I teach one upper-division AIS on-line class a semester, and I already use the Plains Indian Ledger Art Project site, as well as the Smithsonian's winter count site. Other classes where I can use this resource are creative writing classes; introductory American Indian/Alaska Native literature classes, and advanced seminar or directed readings projects. I anticipate adding this project to the trove of ledger art resources.

Final product and dissemination

The completed "Cultural Sovereignty: Two Northern Cheyenne Ledger-Art Notebooks" project will include a book-length, online commentary of the two ledgers. A Portable Document File (PDF) publication is also possible. I include a sample page, which shows the use of this format: overview, description of figures, and interpretation and/or historic context.

The ledgers are already posted at the Kansas State Historic Society's Kansas Memory site:

- Pictures Drawn by Wild Hog and Other Northern Cheyenne Indians <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/208521>
- Drawings by Northern Cheyenne Indians <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/208508>

These individual pages are low resolutions and without annotation of any kind, beyond the archival description of the object. Nancy Sherbert of the KSHS welcomes a copy of my manuscript for the library collection; however, they do not have the web space to post the entire project online. Materials from the project manuscript may be incorporated into online descriptive text.

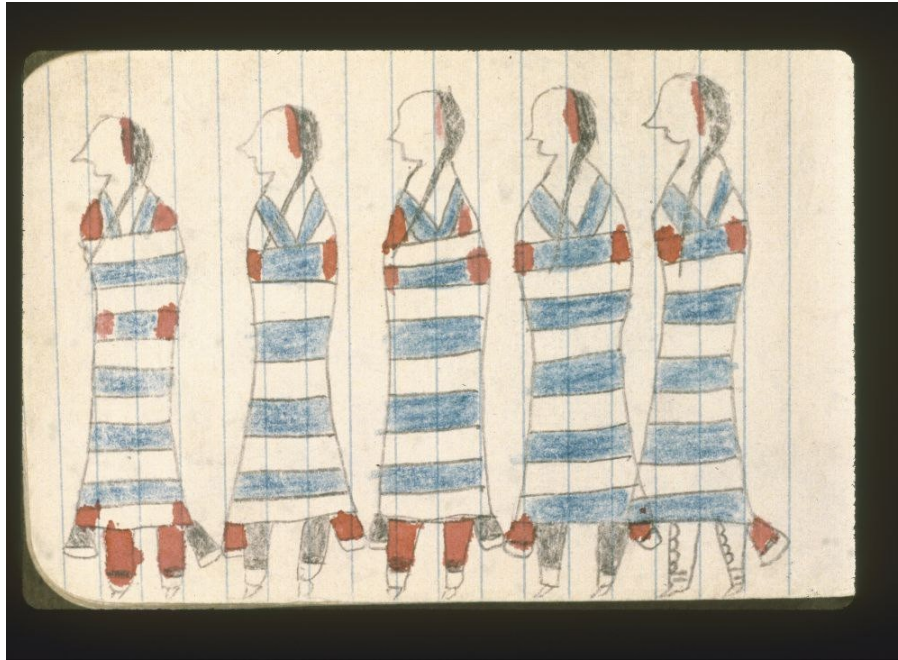
Ross Frank of Plains Indian Ledger Art Project, University of California-San Diego already has fourteen ledgers online, some with book-length commentary: <http://plainsledgerart.org>. I have plans to meet with Frank in late April, 2010, to finalize technicalities of posting this project on the PILA site. He has given a preliminary commitment, and he is finalizing plans with the KSHS about posting their ledgers. I do not foresee any problem with finalizing this project .

My goal is for this project to be available online for researchers and students alike. Although over 200 ledgers exist, they have not been easily accessible. Only a dozen or so complete ledgers have been published as books because of the high cost of reproducing color. The few scholars who work with them must travel to see these individual texts. With the advent of electronic reproduction, scholarship in this area grows.

Especially in the context of PILA's electronic holdings, a fuller picture of the Plains ledgers will be now possible.

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Five men dressed in American flag-colored blankets. (Straughan ledger, p. 2)

Five almost identically dressed Cheyenne men stand in row. Their hair is pulled back and braided, with the exposed side of the head painted red. They are wrapped in blue-and-white, striped blankets with red designs folded to show on the upper torso and shoulders. These are probably Navajo chief blankets.ⁱ These entered Great Plains trade starting in the 1850s, including Lakota and Cheyenne peoples.ⁱⁱ Photographs of the Cheyenne men at the Ford County jail show them with striped blankets.

Below the wrapped blankets breech clouts with white selvage edges reach to their shins. The first, second and fourth men have red clouts; the other two have dark blue clouts. The first man has a legging border of circular designs, which shows below the blanket. The other men wear plain pants or leggings: the second and fourth have gray pants with white border around the ankles; the third and fifth men have red leggings, ending with horizontal black and finally horizontal white stripes around the ankles. Their moccasins are undecorated.

This could also be a war society dance or ceremony, when similar dress, hair style, paint, and the arrangement of men in a line would be appropriate. This could be five of the men incarcerated at Ft. Dodge. The Fort Leavenworth Times indicates: “The following Indians were delivered from the military to civil jurisdiction: Wild Hog, Old Crow, Big Head, Left Hand, Blacksmith, Porcupine, and Nosey-Walker [sic], making seven in all who had been identified except Old Crow, as participators in the crimes....”ⁱⁱⁱ Powell argues the farthest right figure wears “small German silver conchos used on women’s leggings alone.”^{iv}

ⁱPowell, *People of the Sacred Mountain*,

ⁱⁱ Powell, personal correspondence, 12 Feb. 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱQuoted in Barry Johnson, “Cheyennes in Court, An Aftermath of the Dull Knife Outbreak of 1878,” 10.

^{iv} Powell, personal correspondence 12 Feb. 2010. He also notes “the red face paint and its design appear on women in some Northern Cheyenne ledger drawings.” Cowdrey shows a range of red face paint designs catalogued in Arrow’s Elk Society Ledger, but none show a vertical axis like this. Powell agrees that these figures could be men: “At this point of time, and in view of the Cheyennes’ incarceration, these could be Cheyenne men wearing white man’s trousers issued to them, which they wear rolled-up from the bottom.”