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Catalog Rhetoric as Nation-Building
A Textual Analysis of Smithsonian Anthropology Analog Records

La rhétorique muséale comme construction nationale
Une analyse textuelle des archives du catalogue d'articles d'anthropologie du Smithsonian

Amanda H. Sorensen

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Article abstract

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Amanda H. Sorensen
University of Maryland

This case study is a close reading of knowledge organization systems against US state politics, exploring the use of place names within museum records as an ontological practice that furthers and perpetuates nation-building. Throughout this paper, I explore the following question: do the paper records analyzed act as nation building tools and, if so, how? I draw on archival research methods, and textual analysis methods stemming from communication studies to analyze a selection of records, ledger book entries and catalog cards, that document a collection of Northwest Coast materials given to the Smithsonian in 1862 by George Gibbs, a surveyor and naturalist. I ultimately argue that ledger book entries and catalog cards in question (as authored by the Smithsonian) serve as nation-building tools that contribute to the development of a US national identity, and further the dispossession of Indigenous lands by obscuring Indigenous sovereignty.

Keywords: : knowledge organization, museum history and rhetoric, nation-building, Pacific Northwest Indigenous material culture

Introduction

Museums are not neutral, and they have never been. An ongoing t-shirt campaign founded by La Tanya S. Autry and Mike Murawski bears this name, "Museums Are Not Neutral." Contributing "to a long history of activism and support[ing] people today who are working to improve our institutions and society in general", their goal is to engender awareness (Autry & Murawski, 2019). The following analysis demonstrates one way museums were and are deeply implicated within national projects, specifically the ways they employed American place names as an ontological practice contributing to nation-building efforts in the United States (US).

This paper examines analog records, ledger books and catalog cards within the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) anthropology collections associated with one collector, George Gibbs, and his donation from 1862 (approx. 75 pages including the ledger books and catalog cards; accession 000051). This selection of works is comprised of materials and belongings[1] from many Indigenous Nations in the Pacific Northwest, including basketry, canoe models, paddles and paddle models, clothing, cedar mats, bowls and dishes, spoons and ladles, fishing lines, floats, nets, and hooks, all collected and given to the Smithsonian by George Gibbs, a surveyor and naturalist active during the early to mid-19th century.

These materials were accessioned into the US National Museum as part of early efforts to build and realize a national museum for the US. This case study is a close reading of knowledge organization systems against US state politics, exploring the use of place names within museum records as an ontological practice that contributes to nation-building. I ultimately argue that the ledger book entries and catalog cards in question (as authored by the Smithsonian) serve as nation-building tools that contribute to this practice and the development of a US national identity, and further the dispossession of Indigenous lands by obscuring Indigenous sovereignty. Throughout this paper, I explore the following question: do the paper records analyzed act as nation building tools and, if so, how? I understand "nation-building tools" from a theoretical perspective, as any knowledge building practices that work to develop, solidify, and confirm a national identity (Gupta, 2012; Anderson, 1986). I draw on archival research methods[2], and textual analysis methods stemming from com-

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Amanda Sorensen: Asorens1@umd.edu

[1] I use the term "belongings" to talk about non-contemporary Northwest Coast art. Curators at the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia are increasingly using this term, and other museums and Indigenous scholars have started using this term as well (Kramer, 2015; Collison and Levell, 2018). "Belongings" was proposed as an alternative by Larry Grant during the development of an exhibit, csnam: the city before the city, and it underscores how Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples used the materials currently within display cases.

[2] I accessed the paper records analyzed via an appointment at the

munication studies. These types of analyses methods overlap with those employed in information sciences to examine information infrastructures and classification schemes (see Bowker & Star, 2000; Nyitray & Reijerkerk, 2022; Rawson, 2017), and museum anthropology methods for examining material culture (see Greene, 2015; SIMA syllabus, 2023).

This case study complements and extends the existing research taking place within museum anthropology, information studies, and communications by paying close attention to the rhetoric within Smithsonian records, *what* information staff included or excluded and *how* they did so. I intend this study to center information systems that tend to fade into the background and become normalized through everyday work (Turner, 2020; Star & Ruhleder, 1996), surfacing the ways early Smithsonian anthropological records enact and perpetuate US nation-building.

This paper begins by laying historical and theoretical groundwork informing my conclusions, including Smithsonian information history, library science and classification theory, and literature on museum rhetorics. Next, I examine the case study documents, Smithsonian ledger book pages and catalog cards documenting the materials Gibbs collected. A critical reading of these records reveals the ways ledger books and catalog cards use American place names, an ontological practice that contributes to nation-building, in this case the establishment of the US as a nation-state through settler colonialism. I see ledger book entries and catalog cards as a genre of writing that uses place-naming as a rhetorical device to do geographical, ontological work furthering and perpetuating US settler colonialism.

Historical Underpinnings and Theoretical Perspectives

The argument advanced in this paper rests on theoretical work across a number of fields, including library and information science, museum anthropology, and communication studies. This section functions to portray the historical context within which both the Smithsonian records were written (Biesecker, 2006), and the theoretical context within which my analysis took root. Specifically, I explore the following topics: 1) library science frameworks on the "power to name" and how this power has been enacted through US settler colonialism over time; 2) Smithsonian history and information infrastructure development during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and 3) museums rhetorics.

2.1 "Power to Name": Rhetoric of Nationalism

The US is a settler colonial nation (Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). Roxane Dunbar-Ortiz, a historian, writes "the history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism – the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft" (2014, p. 2). Land is of central importance within colonialism. It is "valuable, contested, required" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). The taking of land is not only a physical process, but also accomplished through language: "renaming the land was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land" (Smith, 2021, p. 59).

As such, nation-building has a rhetorical component, one that takes place within museums. The US has drawn on language and rhetoric to shape the development, function, and knowledge output of their national museums: "the values and narratives of [the Enlightenment and Colonial] period have structured what museums are and how they work. . . . Museums do not just describe or collect cultural knowledge; they create it" (Patterson et al., 2012, p. 12; Smith, 2021). In contrast to their history and role within national projects, US museums have developed information infrastructures and knowledge organization (KO) practices that often claim neutrality and rationality, obscuring the harms and nation-building work enacted and perpetuated through these systems (Patterson et al., 2012; Smith, 2021).

Theorists in KO understand classification and naming work as inherently political (Bowker & Star, 2000, pp. 5-6; Olson, 2002; Langridge, 1992). Certain terms, including curio, relic, artifact, fine art, Northwest Coast art, etc., have shaped perceptions of Indigenous material culture: "[S]uch words reflect assumptions about the temporal and spatial distance of Indigenous peoples and cultures and mask the political strategies meant to distance them from their rights to their land, languages, and sovereignty" (Duffek et al., 2021, p. 43). In tandem, the creation of the "Northwest Coast" as a region and a specific culture area emerged out of early anthropological collecting and curation work within North American museums, which furthered broader nation-building projects that renamed, mapped, privatized, and legislated Indigenous land: "when solid lines mark boundaries between First Nations on maps or in museum exhibitions and ethnographic texts, Indigenous understandings of territory, jurisdiction, and sovereignty are obscured" (Duffek et al., 2021, p. 42). Indigenous scholars have observed that naming is linked to claiming (Smith, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2014; 2014a). Language used to categorize, classify, and name can serve as a rhetorical means of asserting national power and sovereignty (Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015; Littletree & Metoyer, 2015).

Historically, Smithsonian practices, including KO schemes, exhibitions, and written records, have developed discourses surrounding Indigenous materials and belongings, exerting naming authority. I see Smithsonian records as nation-building tools that employ rhetoric, leveraged to obscure Indigenous sovereignty and support ongoing ontological work to develop American place names and realize the

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Smithsonian Museum Support Center in Suitland, MD. The ledgers are organized by accession number and catalog cards are arranged by object number. All the ledger book pages and catalog cards are also accessible virtually through the public NMNH database (see L'Eplattenier, 2009; Glenn & Enoch, 2009).

US as a nation-state.

Expeditionary Collecting and George Gibbs

Expeditions and military conquest throughout the Pacific Northwest during the 19th and early 20th centuries functioned to bring greater and greater swaths of Indigenous land under US and Canadian national control. American and Canadian explorers, such as Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, Captain Cook, Captain George Vancouver, and others, voyaged along the coast during the late 1700s and early 1800s, charting geographic features and surveying the land (Lamb, 2010; Woodger & Toropov, 2014). Expeditions included the collecting of flora, fauna, and cultural materials and knowledge, and entailed naming "new" places (Smith, 2021, p. 94). US and Canadian nation-building within the Pacific Northwest through these expeditions resulted in the establishment of US national and state borders, epidemics of smallpox and measles, and the building of forts and trading posts, all of which worked to dispossess Indigenous lands (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

Expeditions and scrambles surrounding gold precipitated both the establishment of US states and Canadian provinces along the Pacific coast. Gold seekers journeyed to the region, bringing "death, rape, starvation, and disease to the Indigenous peoples whose ancestral territories included the sought-after goldfields north and east of San Francisco" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 129). US and Canadian nation-building efforts benefited from the work and movement of gold prospectors. In 1858, "thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand gold prospectors and others from California, Oregon, and Washington crossed into British territory (today British Columbia) to join the few who had been there since the previous year" (Nelson & Kennedy, 2011, p. 105). During this period, settlers overlaid new names onto the land, which "blended the organized effort of the new colonial government with the less structured place-naming of successive waves of incoming miners. These toponymies were imposed over pre-existing Aboriginal and fur trade place names" (Nelson & Kennedy, 2011, p. 120). American and Canadian settler colonialism pursued a similar goal of resource extraction with rhetorical strategies of place-naming, often with the same actors, from gold prospectors to Allen Francis who served as a US Consul in Victoria from 1862-1870 (Fedorak, 1988). US and Canadian settler colonialism are by no means equivalent but overlap in significant ways. It is important to recognize that despite this violence, Indigenous peoples continually resist colonial efforts and exercise their sovereignty. Of the Spanish and Mexican missions in California, none escaped "uprising from within or attacks from outside by communities of the imprisoned along with escapees" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 129).

George Gibbs was enmeshed within this history. Born in 1815, Gibbs moved to the Pacific Northwest during the California gold rush and became a collector at the Port of Astoria, Oregon Territory. Throughout the 1850s, Gibbs worked for the Pacific Railroad Survey and the Northwest Boundary Survey, as a geologist and interpreter from 1857 until 1862 (Smithsonian Institution Archives, n.d., Streeter, 2012). During the early 1860s, Gibbs developed connections with the Smithsonian, and he published an archaeology guide in their 1861 annual report (Turner, 2020, p. 38). He moved to Washington, D.C. in 1862 and spent his retirement learning Indigenous languages "under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution" (Smithsonian Institution Archives, n.d.). Gibbs later expanded his earlier guide on archaeological investigations into a more extensive booklet called "Instructions for the Research Relative to the Ethnology and Philology of America" (Turner, 2020). Gibbs' surveying spanned both the US and Canada, working in tandem with British settlers on joint nation-building goals:

> The land border, as agreed by treaty, was along the 49th parallel, which necessitated locating the parallel through astronomical observation and marking the border by means of wide cuts through forests, erection of cairns, or setting of iron pillars throughout some four hundred miles of mountainous, swampy, or forested wilderness. An American party and a British party worked independently, coordinated by periodic meetings between the survey commissioners and cross-checking one another's work (Eason, 2015, p. 3).

Gibbs' career in the Pacific Northwest overlaps with the reservation era and directly contributed to US and Canadian nation-building efforts to violently expand American hegemony and political control from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Gibbs' collecting activities are a particularly relevant case study, as he wrote the first guides on anthropological collecting at the Smithsonian, shaping what material culture was collected and how it was subsequently interpreted within catalogs (Hinsley, 1981; Turner, 2020) This guidance on how to build collections and associated data about Indigenous peoples were "created and shaped by the assumptive determinations of their makers to collect some data and not others, to interrogate some objects over others and to investigate some variable relationships over others" (Walter & Carroll, 2021, p. 2). We need to understand these assumptions to grasp the Smithsonian's approach to anthropological cataloging. Further, Gibbs' relationship with the Smithsonian demonstrates the historic connections between the development of national collections and the development of nation-states.

Smithsonian History and Information Practices

Broadly, museum history is tied to nation-building and colonialism (Coombes, 1994; Stocking, 1985; Smith, 2021;

Leischner, 2023; Hinsely, 1981; Nichols, 2021). The early development of the Smithsonian as a research institute and then national museum stemmed from Joel R. Poinsett, secretary of war within the Van Buren administration, who "argued for a 'National Museum, with Professors who shall perform the double office of Curators and Lecturers,' as an important component of respectable national culture" (Hinsley, 1981, p. 18).

The Smithsonian was established by congressional act in 1846 (Nichols, 2021). The Centennial Exposition in 1876 thirty years later, a world's fair that endeavored to confirm a vision of US national identity (Rydell, 2006), spurred the establishment of the US National Museum (USMN) in 1881 (Turner, 2020; Nichols, 2021). The US government funded collecting and exhibitions for the Centennial, and the subsequent collected materials became part of the USNM. While Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian, advocated for the separation of the Smithsonian and the USNM,[3] his successor Spencer Baird worked to increase the ties between the Smithsonian and the USNM so much so that "the two became inseparable" (Nichols, 2021, p. 86). The data within the ledger books and catalog cards in question were created prior to the official establishment of the USNM and its Division of Ethnology, a particularly interesting slice of time before the formal establishment of anthropology as a discipline.[4]

When reaching the acquisitions of the Smithsonian, and later the USNM, collections were interpreted, often drawing on natural history and salvage anthropology epistemologies, which generally understood Indigenous Nations as vanishing entities that would leave land for the US taking (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Hinsley, 1981; Turner, 2020). This messaging did not acknowledge US state and federal governments, and settlers, as perpetrators of genocide, or frame the salvage collecting of material itself as furthering this genocide.

Smithsonian anthropology information practices emerged from 19th century natural history and science collecting logics. Anthropology as a discipline had not been formally institutionalized within universities and museums until the late 1800s, during the end of Joseph Henry's tenure as the Smithsonian's first Secretary (1846-1878). When the Pacific Northwest materials that Gibbs acquired entered the Smithsonian collections in 1862, Henry and Baird were developing Smithsonian information infrastructures and KO practices (Star & Ruhleder, 1996; Adler, 2017).

The information infrastructures that Henry and Barid developed have ongoing epistemic and ontological consequences. The Smithsonian created their first anthropology catalog records in 1859, using the same catalog form that Baird created for the biological departments (Greene, 2016, p. 149). Baird based these forms on organization strategies he developed for his personal ornithological collections (Turner, 2020, p. 31). The ledger book practices that Baird developed functioned as the primary information source for Smithsonian anthropology collections from the 1870s through the early 1900s. Otis Mason, an ethnologist, became a curator within the Anthropology Division in 1884 and, during his tenure, he developed the card catalog system (Turner, 2020). Candance Greene, a Smithsonian Anthropologist, suggests that "the core fields defined by the USNM in the 1850s continue to cast an unexamined influence" (2016, p. 159). For example, Greene observes that the "Sex" column in Smithsonian anthropological ledger books did not disappear until 1899 when the "People" column was added, over thirty years after the Smithsonian accepted the 1862 Gibbs collection.

Museums as Rhetorical

Communication studies scholarship has considered the ways museums contribute to broader public and nation-building discourses, treating museums as rhetorical and outlining the rhetorical functions they serve. Several scholars have considered rhetoric within US museums and public monuments in relation to memory, physical space, and notions of "the nation" (Bernard-Donals, 2016; Dickinson et al., 2010; Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009; Maurantonio, 2015; Wesier, 2017). For example, Nicole Maurantonio, a scholar of communication and American studies, examines how the American Civil War Center draws on the material rhetoric of post-it notes, which function to define a "national 'imagined community'" (2015, p. 83) and cement the institution's "cultural authority and the broader authority of the museum as an official institution of public memory" (2015, p. 98). M Elizabeth Weiser, a professor of English, explicitly draws the connections between rhetoric and nation-building within museums: "this book argues for a rhetorical reading of national museums as sites where multiple, intersecting, and at times conflicting acts of identification converge. Out of these acts of identification and division, a sense of the national story is forged and reforged" (2017, p. 4). These scholars understand museum rhetoric as working to build a shared sense of national identity, often furthering settler colonial logics.

In contrast to how rhetoric is marshaled for colonial means, Lisa King, a scholar of Native American, visual, and material rhetorics, analyzes exhibitions at three cultural heritage institutions, arguing that Indigenous sovereignty must be made legible particularly within museums who have wide audiences (2017; 2011). King defines "legible sovereignties" as a "framework for rhetorical action," which makes Indigenous self-determination in communication a primary goal (2017, pp. 8-9). King (2017; 2013; 2011), as well as other

[3]Henry feared that ties between the US government and the Smithsonian would mean that the Smithsonian would be beholden to government funds and thus, US politics (Nichols, 2021).

[4]The NMNH Department of Anthropology, as we now call it, was known as the Division of Ethnology between 1875-1883. In 1883, it was renamed the Anthropology Division (Turner, 2020).

rhetorical scholars (Weiser, 2020; Hasian & Wood, 2010; Bernard-Donals, 2016; Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009; Maurantonio, 2015; Wesier, 2017), are primarily concerned with the discursive practices operating between exhibits and their audiences within their museum analyses, answering questions surrounding how museums contribute to broader political discourses.

This study aims to analyze the rhetorical dimensions of internal museum collections records, associated information infrastructures and KO schemes developed over time, and the ways these rhetorics work to establish and further US nationalism. The ledger book pages and catalog cards I analyzed have a much narrower audience than an exhibition, typically just including a handful of internal staff and external researchers and perhaps descendant community members. The reach of this information is likely smaller than an exhibition, but that does not mean that its impact is small. These catalog texts are often some of the first sources referred to when developing exhibitions, shaping subsequent displays and their messaging.

Case Study: Pacific Northwest Indigenous Belongings collected by Gibbs

Drawing on textual analysis methods with the ledger book and catalog card records associated with the 1862 Gibbs collection, I argue that these records reflect broader ontological nation-building efforts by asserting American place names. A critical reading of these records reveals the ways ledger books and catalog cards firmly place Indigenous materials under Smithsonian and broader Euro-American knowledge systems via language use and place names (C. W. Smith, personal communication, April 22, 2022), sidestepping Indigenous sovereignty, rhetorically furthering land dispossession, and functioning to ontologically realize the US as a nation-state.

4.1 Ledger Books: Columns and Rows

Visually, ledger books resemble spreadsheets. The rows and columns associated with the 1862 Gibbs collections are used in different ways. Some are consistently used, such as "current number" (Smithsonian catalog number), "original number" (any numbers linked to the materials as ascribed by the collector or donor), name of the work (virtually all English names in this case), "locality," and "collected by." Other columns remain blank often, including "when collected," "nature of object," "measurement," "received from," and "cost." "Number of specimens" is left blank often also, seemingly telling readers that a catalog number includes one piece unless otherwise marked. The "sex" column, a holdover from biological collections information practices (Turner, 2020; Greene, 2016), is routinely ignored and is often used as an extension of the "object name" section. In a similar fashion, the "when collected" and "nature of object" columns are also at times used as an extension of locality. These uses of the columns speak to their narrowness. They do not allow significant room to record information about the collection, leading to the extension into less useful columns and the use of abbreviations, such as "N. W. Coast." These observations detail the specificities of ledger books as a medium (Gitelman, 2006).

Baird worked toward a "systematic registration" practice across the collections, which included labeling "specimens," or biological collections, and entering information in record books and subsequently ledgers documenting class, order, localities, sex, date, measurements, and "other memoranda" (Smithsonian Institution Annual Report, 1857, p. 50, quoted in Turner, 2020). Despite these efforts to establish a standard for what data was collected and to adapt scientific, natural history methods to cultural collections (Turner, 2020), terminology and construction of data within the ledger book fields was not standardized. The object names given to the materials vary in their construction. Some records state "paddle," while others are called "whaling paddles," or "models of Chinook paddles." Some object names include descriptors of a material ("cedar bark mat"), the originating Nation ("Chinook Moccasins"), or a function ("basket for carrying" and "breakfast and dinner plate") associated with that material, and others just list an English name. The vast majority of materials are described in English with object names, such as "tray," "hat," and "cape." Of the seventy entries representing the 1862 Gibbs collection, only two seem to have incorporated Indigenous names into the records (663-E and 665-E), but even so, these phonetic spellings are mapped into the roman alphabet and placed in quotations. These inconsistencies in "object name" demonstrate the ways Baird, later Otis Mason, and the broader 19th century scientific community were working within Smithsonian data practices while also trying to establish them.

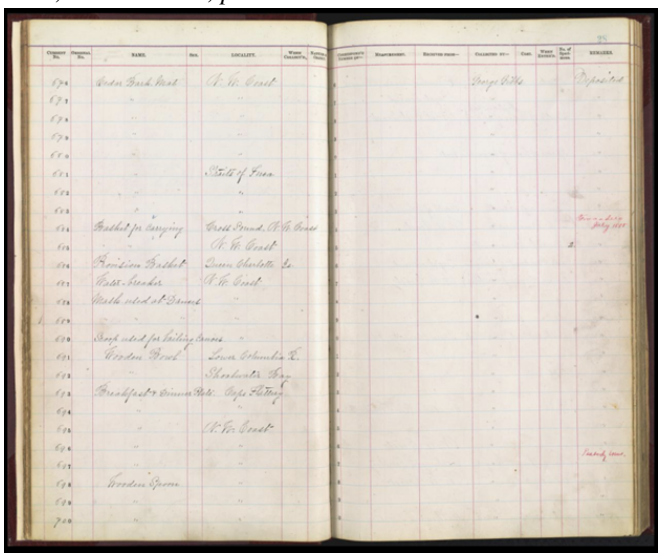
Further, these records are minimally associated with originating Nations, if at all. This is perhaps not surprising given the history of Smithsonian anthropological cataloging. Ledger books did not prompt catalogers for an originating Nation with the "People" column until 1899 (Greene, 2016). Of the seventy records, only four name specific Indigenous Nations (641-E, 673-E, 674-E, and 701-E). The first three include a Nation name with the "object name," while the fourth (701-E) record states "Columbia River, Chinook" under "locality." The place names associated with the recorded works are also the English names for these newly colonized places, including "Fort Simpson," the "Columbia River," "Puget Sound," "Queen Charlotte Islands," and the "N. W. Coast." The "Yakama River" and the "Klamath River" are the only other names that reference the Indigenous peoples who perhaps made and/or owned a portion of the materials collected by Gibbs, but these are still bodies of water named by colonizers after Indigenous Nations.

Gibbs was involved in early conversations at the Smithso-

nian about what data the institution should document about its collections. He specified that collectors should "include information on the name of the tribe and its geographical location as well as the number of individuals in the community" (Turner, 2020, p. 41). It is possible that Gibbs did not follow his own guidance, but I find it more likely that a breakdown in communication occurred, meaning catalogers did not or could not carry this information over into the ledgers and subsequently, catalog cards and digital records.

Figure 1

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History ledger book, volume 001A, p. 28.



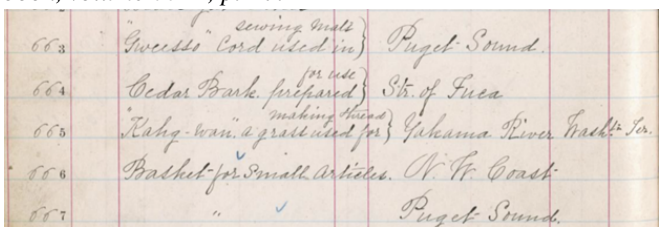
The stickiness of associated American place names in these records endures to the present. The Haida Nation reached an agreement with the British Columbia government in 2009 to rename the "Queen Charlotte Islands" as Haida Gwaii, its original name prior to colonization (CBC News, 2009). Despite this change, the "district/county" listed within the associated database record lists "Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii)" (Smithsonian Institution, NMNH Department of Anthropology E715-0 database record). This text is indicative of how information within these systems sticks, maintaining durability and authority over time (Turner, 2016). This echoes what Emily Jean Leischner, a museum anthropologist, insightfully argues regarding Indigenous law:

> anthropology museums are complicit in a pattern of attempted erasure of Indigenous legal authority through their collecting, accessioning, and display practices. The refusal to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous law and jurisdiction over land and material culture is part of the logics justifying ongoing settler colonial dispossession and violence (2022, p. 42).

The ledger book records analyzed demonstrate minimal and haphazard associations between the collected materials and their originating communities, if at all, distancing the collected materials from both originating Nations and lands.

Figure 2

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History ledger book, volume 001A, p. 27.



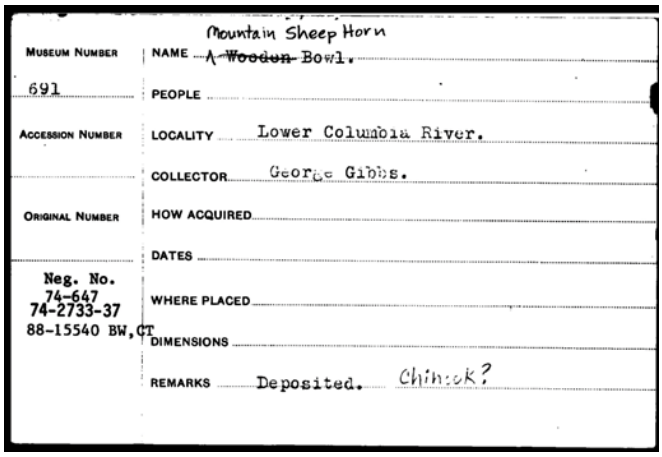
Catalog Cards: Structured Knowledge Production

The most significant difference between catalog cards and the ledger books is the inclusion of the "people" field. For the 1862 Gibbs collection, this would have required some legwork on the part of Smithsonian staff. Many of the ledger book records for this collection list "N. W. Coast," a vast swath of land home to many, many Indigenous Nations. The ledger book rarely links a collected material to an originating community, meaning research staff would have needed to attribute a work, which can be very challenging. Even if data includes a specific place, people and works are mobile. It is not as cut and dry as linking a location to an originating Nation. Further, developing skills in attributing artists and makers to their work take years to develop, involving dedicated time to view example works in-person and through archival photos. Attribution often involves consultation with Indigenous Nations and extended periods of time sifting through historical and archival records. Attempts to connect the collected materials to Indigenous Nations were done with uncertainty at times. For one bowl (E691-0), a handwritten note reads "Chinook?" under the remarks field.[5]

[5]The Chinook Nation is not currently federally recognized, even though the Smithsonian, a federal organization, lists several belongings and materials in the 1862 Gibbs collection as originating from the Chinook Nation.

Figure 3

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History catalog card E691-0.


Museum Number 691
Accession Number
Original Number
Neg. No. 74-647 74-2733-37 88-15540 BW,CT
NAME Mountain Sheep Horn ~~A Wooden~~ Bowl.
PEOPLE
LOCALITY Lower Columbia River.
COLLECTOR George Gibbs.
HOW ACQUIRED
DATES
WHERE PLACED
DIMENSIONS
REMARKS Deposited. Chinook?

Another stark different between the ledger book records and the catalogue cards is the marked inclusion of Smithsonian institutional history as associated with a given work. About one third of the catalog cards (17/52) replicate the information within the ledger book, including museum numbers, object name, locality, and collector, and do not add any additional information aside from the negative numbers associated with the tracking of photograph negatives. For the rest of the catalog cards, the information added over the years reflects the history of a material within the Smithsonian. For example, many cards refer readers to Smithsonian annual reports, exhibition catalogs, and publications that feature a particular work. Reviewing these catalog cards informs viewers about a Renwick Gallery exhibition from 1972-1973, the publication of an associated exhibition catalog in 1974, an 1869 piece written by James Swan, an anthropologist active during the late 19th century, and a few internal reports. Both Baird and Mason spearheaded the development of anthropological information practices at the Smithsonian, aiming to make "good data" for science, as informed by natural history disciplines (Turner, 2020; Hinsley, 1981; Henson, 2008). However, much of the "data" we see on these cards is about the culture, history, and practices of the Smithsonian (C. W. Smith, personal communication, April 22, 2022). In contrast, the catalog cards do little to reflect details about these works before they arrived at the Smithsonian (C. W. Smith, personal communication, April 22, 2022), often expressing confusion concerning originating locations and Tribal affiliations. Additionally, for the third of catalog cards that replicate the ledger book information, American place names are often carried over, an example of which is in figure 3.

The ledger books and catalog cards analyzed take a dual approach in creating the impression of distance in order to justify the settler colonial taking of Indigenous lands. The ledgers and catalog cards distance materials and their originating communities rhetorically, in part by asserting the importance of colonial, American place names and through minimal acknowledgement of Indigenous Nation names. Additionally, by using American place names and not acknowledging Indigenous place names or sovereignty, the Smithsonian records analyzed attempt to distance Indigenous peoples from their lands. In this way, place names were used strategically as a tool within US settler colonialism and nation-building agendas.

The impacts of these ledger books and catalog cards reverberate today and continue to obscure the continued presence of sovereign Indigenous Nations throughout what we now refer to as the Pacific Northwest, and across North America for that matter. Rhetorically, these analog records associated with the 1862 Gibbs collection and the legacy data therein carries the ontological, nation-building practices of place-naming into the present with enduring consequences.

As with any information infrastructure, organizational structures and the legacy data within tend to stick over time, carrying inertia into the present, perpetuating harm across cultural heritage institutions (Adler, 2017; Turner, 2020; Bowker & Star, 2000). A study on Paumanok (Long Island, NY) as described in Library of Congress authorities documents the enduring legacies of settler colonial place names and the effort taken to disrupt their continued use:

> Variant names and headings for Indigenous peoples are extremely limited and do not reflect the multiplicity in peoples belonging to more than one community. Despite the prevalence and abundance of Indigenous place names, discrepancies and inconsistencies exist. . . . Ultimately, accurate controlled vocabularies and classifications are not established without direct action from catalogers (Nyitray & Reijerkerk, 2022, 34).

Correcting these infrastructures can be very complicated. For example, scholarship on place name use at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia attests to the complexities of attributing belongings to locations or groups of people: "Teasing apart any assumptions about what the fields mean, and how locations and names were crafted, is a key part of raising historical consciousness about what categories can and cannot do" (Turner et al., 2024). The information infrastructures and legacy data created by the Smithsonian and Gibbs during the early and mid-19th century is not divorced from the present, but continues to impact current database records and organizational strategies, trickling into scholarship, exhibition development, repatriation processes, research, etc.

Concluding Thoughts: Connections Amongst Records and Paths Forward

Place naming is an ontological practice that can be marshalled for nation-building means. The ledger book entries and catalog cards analyzed are a genre of writing, which use place-naming as a rhetorical device to further the realization of the US through settler colonialism. These records attempt to distance Indigenous peoples and their cultural heritage and from their lands. American place names are used to create this distance, despite ongoing Indigenous sovereignty and efforts to resist American settler colonialism.

As evidenced in the previous examples (Turner et al., 2024; Nyitray & Reijerkerk, 2022, p. 34), many cultural heritage institutions have yet to realize Indigenous "rhetorical sovereignty" or the "inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs" (Lyons, 2000, pp. 499-450) within their collections. Information and its structures carry inertia, perpetuating impacts through time. Place names in museum information systems are no different and they create sticky challenges when working to determine provenance and attribution, and close the distance between these materials, their communities of origin, and originating lands. The analyzed records demonstrate the force needed to counter this inertia on the part of cultural heritage professionals to thwart the nation-building work perpetuated through legacy data.

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