

## The Power of Publicity

By Mary Heng

With or without legislation, repatriation has always required dogged efforts, as revealed by the saga of a Hidatsa (Gros Ventre) clan from North Dakota to reclaim a sacred bundle. The Water Buster clan bundle was lost in the 1920's when the caretaker sold the skulls to a Presbyterian minister. The bundle ended up with the Heye Foundation, a collection now part of the National Museum of the American Indian.

In the mid-1930's, clan members turned to Arthur Mandan for help in recovering the bundle. Mandan, not a member of the Water Buster clan, served on the tribal business council. He had a reputation for

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IBM Corporation is the Repatriation Foundation's first corporate sponsor. We look forward to a long and mutually beneficial partnership. Special thanks to Stanley S. Litow, V.P. of Corporate Community Relations, and Larry Gutstein, IBM Native American Indian Diversity Task Force.



*From left to right: President Roosevelt, Drags Wolf, Foolish Bear, and Arthur Mandan participate in the exchange ceremony returning the sacred bundle to the Hidatsa. Photo courtesy of Corbis Bettmann.*

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expression and he grasped the power of public opinion. Mandan's tug of war with the Heye Foundation lasted two years. Excerpts from letters reveal some of the cultural barriers:

*Dec. 31, 1936  
Dear Arthur,*

*The matter of its return has been taken up with the Museum, but the people there say they cannot return it inasmuch as it is part of the Indian collection. They want to keep it.*

*Do you think a copy of it would be acceptable? Some of the older members of the clan might be able to work "medicine" on it. If that won't be acceptable, would it be*

*possible for you to use photographs? It might be possible that they would rub the original over the copy of the photographs and that might have some effect with the old timers.*

*Sincerely yours,  
D.E. Murphy*

Mandan's answer reflects tribal members' complete understanding of the issues at stake:

*Dear Danire:*

*I read the letter to the older members of the clan, and they wish me to ask whether the Museum would take \$250 for the return of*

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## Welcome

It is with much pleasure and great enthusiasm that I write of new developments taking place here at the Repatriation Foundation. In December 1997, our Board expanded to include Vine Deloria, Jr., Esq. (*Standing Rock Sioux*) and Oren Lyons (*Onondaga*). It is an honor to welcome these renowned leaders to our organization. As of April 1998, Anne Bleecker Corcos, a co-founder of SEEDS (Seeking Equanimity on Earth and Diversity in the Sacred), has joined the Board as well.

We have established an Advisory Committee. Founding members include Gloria Emerson (*Navajo*), LaDonna Harris (*Comanche*), Winona LaDuke (*Anishinabe*), N. Scott Momaday (*Kiowa*), Buffy Sainte-Marie (*Sac & Fox*), Gail Small (*Northern Cheyenne*), and Dagmar Thorpe (*Sac & Fox*). Gail Bruce has joined our ten member National Support Committee.

Anne Cassidy is now the Foundation's Director of Outreach. She is happy to answer any questions regarding repatriation and/or the Foundation. Anne can be contacted via e-mail at [RepatFdn@aol.com](mailto:RepatFdn@aol.com)

As we begin our 7<sup>th</sup> year we have new support and commitment. We are looking forward to an important year ahead.

Elizabeth Sackler, President

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## RETROSPECT

✿ President Elizabeth Sackler participated in a conference entitled "Law and the Sacred: Native American Repatriation" held at the University of Chicago in late October 1997. The conference addressed the implementation of NAGPRA, as well as legal and ethical issues regarding Native American ceremonial material held in collections not covered by NAGPRA. Dr. Sackler sat on the "Trafficking and Private Collectors" panel.

✿ "Continuing Native Ways," a San Francisco conference sponsored by the First Peoples Fund, was held in late October 1997. Elizabeth Sackler attended, and speakers included

Vine Deloria, Dagmar Thorpe, Norbert Hill, Elouise Cobell, Winona LaDuke, and Gail Small.

✿ Board member Martin Sullivan moderated a colloquium in New York entitled "Repatriation of Native American Collections: Related Legislation and Response" on December 8, 1997. The colloquium was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and organized by the Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. Both President Elizabeth Sackler and Vice President Marilyn Youngbird attended the colloquium.

## Watching the Art Market

When sacred American Indian material is offered for sale at auctions and galleries, the gallery owner or auction house specialists are sometimes unaware of the sacred nature of the objects. Consignors are not always informed that repatriation is an option, and that they are eligible for a tax deduction should they choose to return sacred material to the appropriate Native group. Since the major sales of American Indian material are well publicized and illustrated catalogs are usually published weeks in advance of the sale, it is possible to monitor the market and contact galleries and auction houses before they sell ceremonial objects.

Most of the big auction houses hold their sales in May and November. Below are a few important sources of information regarding upcoming sales of American Indian material:

**Sotheby's**  
New York  
(800) 444-3709 (catalog orders only). Two American Indian "art" auctions per year. Catalogs: \$53 annual subscription.

**Butterfield & Butterfield**  
San Francisco  
(415) 861-7500  
Two Ethnographic (including American Indian "art") auctions per year. Catalogs: \$23.50 each.

**Christie's Publications**  
New York  
(718) 784-1480  
Two American Indian "art" auctions per year. Catalogs: \$35 each or \$55 annual subscription.

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*the skulls alone. They say these skulls once lived as humans with the Gros Ventres and were members of the above said clan.*

*Now Chicken brother, see what you can do for the Water Buster Clan.*

*Sincerely yours,  
Arthur Mandan*

Mandan stepped up the pressure in 1937, spreading the story of the bundle to legislators and reporters. Mandan's children say he addressed at least one session of Congress, but the newspapers proved to be the key. In interviews, Mandan not only asserted that the bundle held ancestral bones, but that its absence from North Dakota contributed to the drought ravaging the prairies. Readers related to both issues, and created enough interest that the museum consented to a trade: the bundle for an equal artifact.

In January of 1938, Mandan and two members of the Water Buster clan, Drags Wolf, 75, and Foolish Bear, 84, went to New York, taking with them "artifacts" to trade: a hastily assembled stone hammer roughed up to look old, and a sun-bleached bison horn stuffed with sage. The delegation received the red-carpet treatment. There was a dinner at the home of Joseph Kennedy, and a meeting with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Before the end of the week, more than a dozen stories ran in New York papers alone.

Photographers crowded the room in which the exchange ceremony took place. At the climax, the museum staff, who had insisted they knew how to care for relics better than the Hidatsa, opened the bundle, revealing the skulls and sacred objects.

# Perspectives

## The Shield That Came Back

From *In the Presence of the Sun*

By N. Scott Momaday

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Turning Around tested his son Yellow Grass. "You must kill thirty scissortails and make me a fan of their feathers."

"Must I make the whole fan?" asked Yellow Grass. "Must I do the beadwork too?" Yellow Grass had never made a fan.

"Yes. You must do the beadwork too — blue and black and white and orange."

"Those are the colors of your shield," said Yellow Grass.

Yellow Grass fretted over the making of his father's fan, but when at last it was finished it was a fine, beautiful thing, the feathers tightly bunched and closely matched, their sheen like a rainbow — yet they could be spread wide in a disc, like a shield. And the handle was beaded tightly. The blue and black and white and orange beads glittered in every light. And there was a long bunch of doeskin fringes at the handle's end.

When Turning Around saw the fan he said nothing, but he was full of pride and admiration. Then he went off on a raiding expedition to the Pueblo country, and there he was killed. After that, Yellow Grass went among the Pueblos and redeemed his father's shield. But the fan could not be found.

When he was an old man Yellow Grass said to his grandson Handsome Horse, "You see, the shield was more powerful than the fan, for the shield came back and the fan did not. Some things, if they are very powerful, come back. Remember that. For us, in this camp, that is how to think of the world."

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Foolish Bear and Drags Wolf rushed forward to shield the contents from photographers.

When the delegation returned to North Dakota with the bundle, lightning pierced the winter clouds for 40 miles up and down the Missouri River. That spring, as clan members came from across the

Dakotas to celebrate before the skulls, the skies opened, and water poured to the ground. Later that year, Arthur Mandan was elected the first tribal chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes.

*Special thanks to Mary Heng for contributing this story for our newsletter.*

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## In Print

### *Blessing for a Long Time: The Sacred Pole of the Omaha Tribe.*

Robin Ridington & Dennis Hastings. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. The authors adopt the conventions of Omaha oral narratives to tell the story of the Sacred Pole (called Umon'hon'ti, the Venerable Man), a symbol of tribal unity. The tribe relinquished the Pole to Harvard's Peabody Museum in 1888 under severe pressure from the U.S. Government. The Sacred Pole was finally returned by the museum in 1989.

### *Common Ground: Archeology and Ethnography in the Public Interest.*

Published quarterly by the National Park Service's Archeology and Ethnography Program. Produced in a feature magazine style (including

graphics), this magazine covers archeology and ethnography undertaken by federal agencies. Each issue is usually theme-oriented with news, enforcement of preservation laws, and NAGPRA coverage. To subscribe free of charge, contact Joe Flanagan at: NPS Archeology and Ethnography Program (2275), 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240; fax (202) 523-1547; e-mail joe\_flanagan@nps.gov.

### *A Time Before Deception: Truth in Communication, Culture, and Ethics.*

Thomas W. Cooper. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1998. Explores the forms, meanings, and ethics of Indigenous communication and presents evidence that Native cultures may have originated from higher – not more “primitive” – civilizations.

## Introductions

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**Staff & Officers:** Anne Cassidy; Rebecca Hill; Gina Genter; Kelleigh Smith; Jack Trope, Esq. & Neal I. Gantcher, Esq. (counsel).

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