

Caring for *tataayiyam honuuka'* (Ancestors) Affected by Past Museum Practices

Lylliam Posadas, Özge Gençay-Üstün,
Desireé Reneé Martinez, Karimah Kennedy
Richardson, Cindi Moar Alvitre



Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums
Annual International Meeting

October 12, 2017

AUTRY
MUSEUM
OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Introductions

- **Lylliam Posadas, MSc, NAGPRA Coordinator, Autry Museum of the American West**
- **Özge Gençay-Üstün, M.A., Conservator, Autry Museum of the American West**
- **Desiree Martinez, M.A., Tribal Archaeologist, Gabrielino (Tongva)**
- **Karimah Richardson, M.A., Archaeologist, Autry Museum of the American West**
- **Cindi Alvitre, M.A., Lecturer and NAGPRA Coordinator at CalState, Long Beach, Director of Ti'at Society, Gabrielino (Tongva)**

Approach to Presentation

- **Overview of the Stakeholders**
- **Reason for Collaboration**
- **Audience Participation – Choose your own Adventure**
- **Outcomes**
- **Lessons Learned**

Collaborative Case Study



The screenshot shows the Penn Museum website. At the top left is the Penn Museum logo. To the right, it says "UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM of ARCHAEOLOGY and ANTHROPOLOGY". Below this is a dark blue navigation bar with links: Visit, Programs, Exhibitions, Collections, Research, Teachers & Students, Give / Join, and Information. A search box is on the right. Below the navigation bar is a collage of seven photographs showing various archaeological conservation activities: a person cleaning a wall, two people working on a stone surface, a person using a tool on a stone, a person working on a large stone block, a person working on a wall, a person working on a stone block, and two people standing together. Below the collage is a navigation menu with links: Home, Conservation Symposium 2016, Schedule, and Contributors. To the right of the menu is the text "ENGAGING CONSERVATION: COLLABORATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES" and "Penn Museum Symposium Join us in Philadelphia: October 6-8, 2016 at the Penn Museum, 3260 South St, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA."

ENGAGING CONSERVATION: COLLABORATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Penn Museum Symposium
Join us in Philadelphia: October 6-8, 2016 at the Penn Museum, 3260 South St, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.

Publication Forthcoming: Gençay-Üstün, Ö., Posadas, L., Renéé Martinez D., Kennedy Richardson, K., and Moar Alvitre, C. Conserving the tataayiyam honuuka' (Ancestors): A Case Study at the Autry Museum of the American West

Content Warning

There are photos of ancestral remains in this presentation. Members of the Gabrielino (Tongva) community have decided that these photos should be shown to discuss the complexities of the issues described here.

The Stakeholders

The Gabrielino (Tongva)

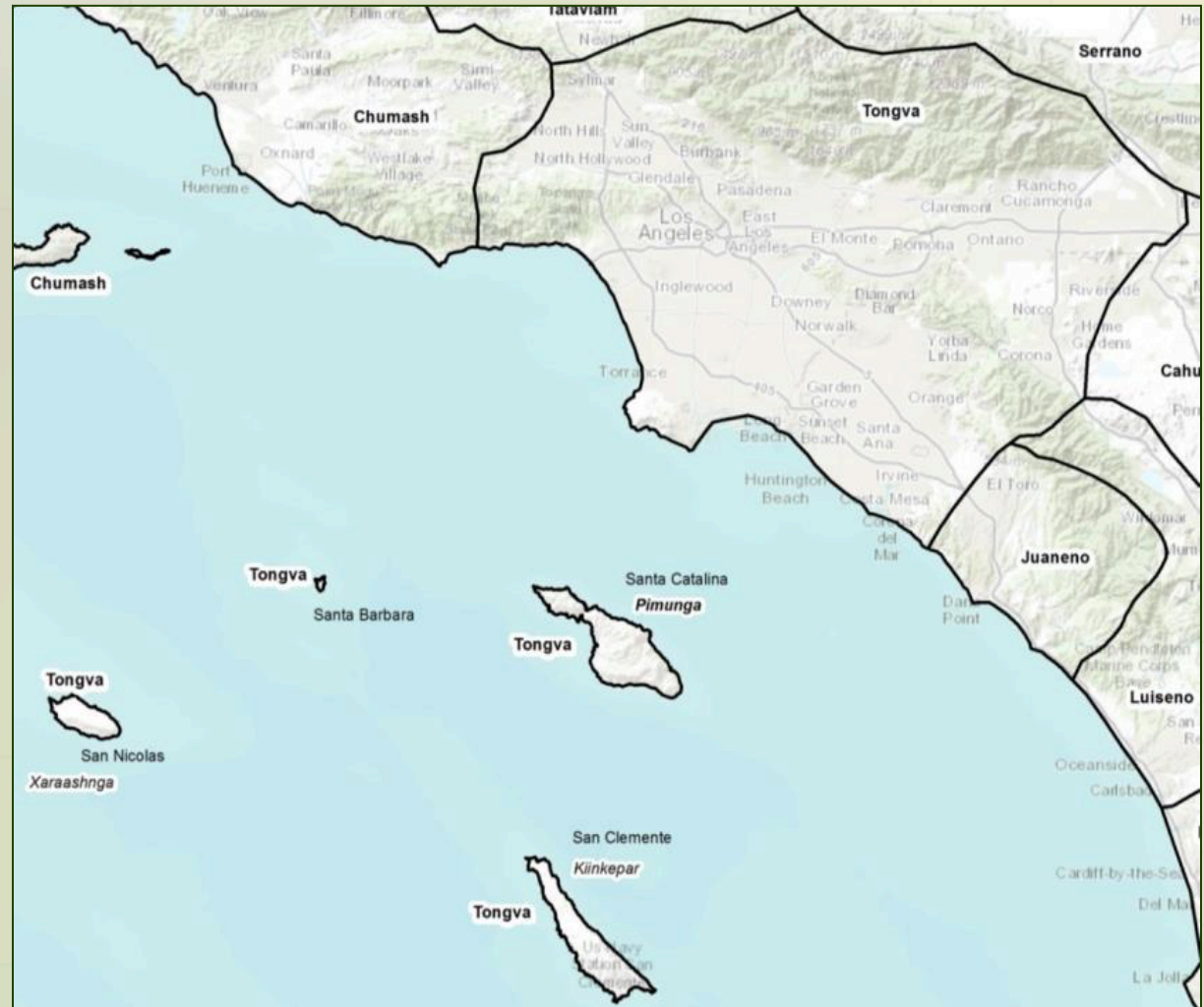
2,493 people in
California (2,903
nationwide)
identified as Tongva
on the 2010 United
States Census.

**WE ARE STILL A
VIBRANT
COMMUNITY.**



Gabrielino (Tongva) Territory

The Gabrielino (Tongva) are a non-federally recognized tribe whose traditional territory includes Los Angeles, CA



Autry Museum of the American West

- Located in Los Angeles, California
- Institutional History
- The Southwest Museum Staff in the 1930s
- Edwin F. Walker



Larry Reynolds, *Southwest Museum of the American Indian from Museum Drive, Los Angeles, California, 1986.*
Color print. Braun Research Library Collection, Autry Museum; P. 56086

The Issue: Moving To a New Facility



Case Study Question

Your museum is moving to a new building. In preparation for the move, you find a human skull that is encased in dirt.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

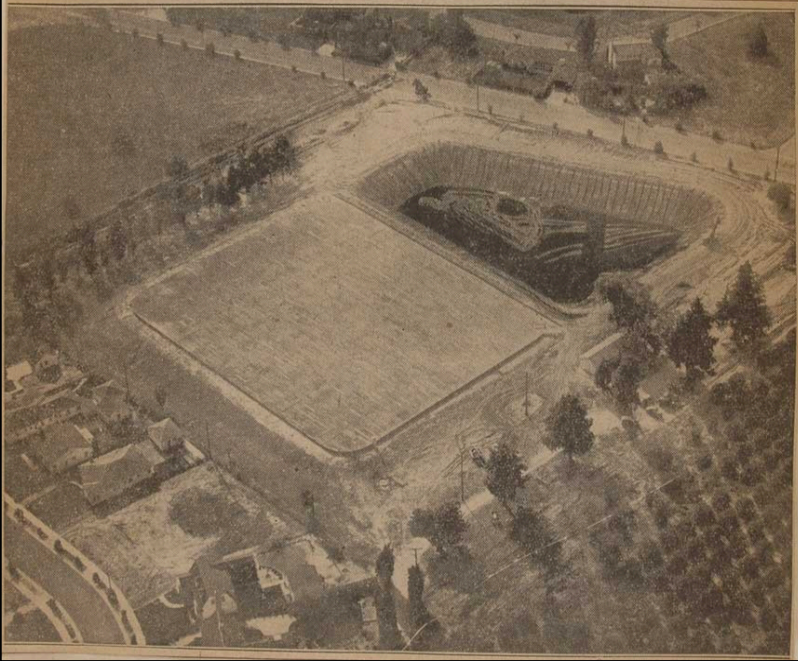
Answer: Gather Background Information

- **Where were the Ancestors removed from**
- **Who removed the Ancestors and why**
- **How were they treated after removal**

**Sensitive
image on the
next slide**

Sheldon Reservoir Archaeology

Rock-Like, Oil-Soaked Foundation of New Sheldon Reservoir Unit Nearly Ready For Concrete Lining



Clipping of the Pasadena Sheldon Reservoir Project Area, MS220.4.20 Courtesy of Braun Research Library Collection Autry Museum of the American West



Pedestaled Ancestral Burials, MS220.4.47, Courtesy of Braun Research Library Collection Autry Museum of the American West

Sheldon Reservoir on Display



Much media surrounded the project, MS220.4.14, Courtesy of Braun Research Library Collection Autry Museum of the American West



The remains uncovered were put on display at the Southwest Museum of American Indian, MS220.4.19, Courtesy of Braun Research Library Collection Autry Museum of the American West



Objects in addition to remains went on display, 270.L.43, Courtesy of Southwest Museum of American Indian Collection at the Autry Museum of the American West

Case Study Question

You have completed the Background Research.

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Answer: Contact the Tribal Community

- Tongva community members had already been working with Southwest Museum/Autry staff for over 20 years

People of California and People of the Southwest

Kim Walters Curator

In January 2005, the opening of *People of California and People of the Southwest: Changing Traditions* brings a fresh face and Native voices to the exhibition spaces of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. As the accompanying article by Cindi Alvitre details, the creation of these exhibitions speaks to a new relationship between the museum and Indian communities. Alvitre and other Native advisors have collaborated with curators in the selection of objects and the writing of accompanying texts. Their influence shows particularly in the new emphasis on the persistence and adaptability of Indian traditions.

The theme of continuing traditions is woven throughout the *People of California* exhibition. One entirely new area focuses on the activities of contemporary Native California people. This section highlights the California Indian Basketweavers Association, the California Indian Storytelling Association, Neshkinukat: California Native Artists Network, Title VII, Los Angeles Unified School District Native American Indian Education, and the American Indian Chamber of Commerce of California. It also examines California Indian gaming, revealing gaming as both a tradition and a new economic force in the state.

Previous Work with the Autry

- **Tongva community members had been participating in the move since 2012**



November 15, 2012

RE: Autry National Center Collections Move

To Whom it May Concern:

Greetings! I hope this letter finds you and your community in good health. I am writing today to inform you that the Autry National Center (The Autry) will be moving its museum collections from the Mt. Washington (Southwest Museum of the American Indian) and the Griffith Park campuses to a new state of the art research facility located in Burbank, California. The move, to be completed in a number of phases, is scheduled to begin November 26, 2012 and end in 2015. This new facility is the partial fulfillment of one of the many goals the Autry has to improve the collections' environment, by providing temperature and humidity control and access, as well as to create more space for tribal members during collection visits. Robert Brown of the Oneida Nation thought that it was important to ask for the committee's input.



Answer: Contact the Tribal Community

- Informally contacted Tribal community members regarding the Ancestors
- Meeting occurred with tribal representatives to discuss options



**Sensitive
images on the
next slide**

Past Treatments and Present Problems

Investigation of the non-original materials visually and using analytical tools with permission



Photo of shiny red/dark orange resin on 270.L.55A



Photo of red/dark orange resin drip marks on 270.L.60

Answer: Contact the Tribal Community

- Informally contacted Tribal community members regarding the Ancestor
- Meeting occurred with tribal representatives to discuss options
- Requested more information regarding history of Ancestor



Case Study Question

You have met with the tribal representatives.

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Continued Conversations with Tribal Representatives

- **Autry staff provided the requested information regarding the Ancestor**
- **Tribal representatives reached out to other community members**

Most Likely Descendant

- Under California Public Resources Code, if the County Coroner determines human remain are Native American, the Native American Heritage Commission identifies the Most Likely Descendant (MLD).
- The MLD provides recommendations on how the Ancestor will be treated and ultimately reburied.
- Robert Dorame was appointed MLD for a current project at the Sheldon Reservoir.
- Asked D. Martinez and K. Kennedy regarding the Ancestors at the Autry and asked about the possibility of reburying them with the new Ancestors recovered.



Continued Conversations with Tribal Representatives

- **Autry staff provided the requested information regarding the Ancestor**
- **Tribal representatives reached out to other community members**
- **Continued discussions regarding logistics of move, who will participate, how will participate, for how long, etc.**

Case Study Question

You have continued discussions with tribal representatives.

WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Answer: Complete Condition Assessment

What is a Conservator?

- In a general sense, a conservator is a person who protects materials of culture or nature.

Mission of art conservators

- Art conservators' mission is to preserve and protect cultural materials for the next generations to enjoy and learn from them.



My first mentor Julie Lauffenburger at the Walters Art Museum.

Image source: <http://articles.thewalters.org/art-conservator-qa-with-julie-lauffenburger/>

The Conservator's Mindset

- **Document through written and photographic methods**
 - Present condition (visual and structural condition of materials)
 - Past treatments (visual and by means of analytical tools)
- **Preventive conservation**
 - House them safely in an environment that is appropriate for the materials at hand
 - Monitor the condition of the item
 - Monitor the storage area for environmental conditions
- **Interventive conservation**
 - If not stable, find a way to stabilize it
 - If there are any foreign materials obscuring or harming the original remove them
 - Keep a record of any intervention you made

Sheldon Reservoir Ancestors: Conservation Methodology

First consult with the communities for the steps to follow and keep the communication open:

- **Gather information about the past treatment of Ancestors**
 - During excavation
 - After excavation
- **Investigate the non-original materials visually using analytical tools with permission**
- **Written and photographic documentation of finds to present the evidence to the tribal members with permission**
- **Meet and discuss how we can safely handle them during the move, make recommendations**

Open discussion and joint deliberation

Conservation Issues for the Move of the Ancestors

- **Pesticides**
- **Condition**
 - inherently fragile material
 - dirt matrix
- **Past treatments**
 - resins
 - unusual marks in the dirt matrix
 - former collections and packing history
- **Discuss if active treatment is needed before packing**
- **Handling and proper rehousing for packing**
- **Providing detailed final condition reports and treatment strategies**

Case Study Question

You have completed the Condition Assessment.

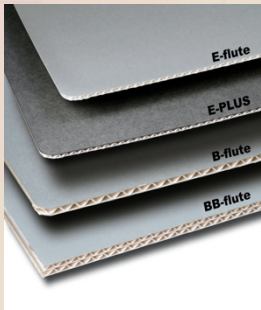
WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Outcomes

Conservation Recommends

- Rehousing materials for the move
- Handling items with special needs

Preparing the Ancestors

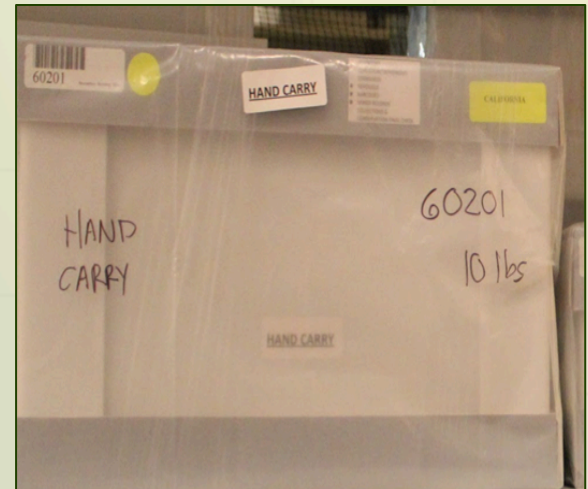


- Archival corrugated boards are used to make boxes
- Polyethylene foams and polyester batting are used for soft cushioning
- Zipper lock bags and muslin are used for housing individual loose pieces
- Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) or twill tape is used for tacking down fragile parts
- High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) or Tyvek® liners are used for interfacing
- Good resources on the handouts

**Sensitive images on
the following slides**

Special Treatments

- After deliberation, it was decided to hand carry some of the items due to their fragile condition
- Offerings are accepted in airtight closed jars to prevent pest infestation of the collections area



Witnessing The Move

- Prayers and offerings for all of those involved
- Setting the tone for participants



Tribal Participation



Moving the Ancestors



Moving the Ancestors: The Route



Moving the Ancestors



Post Move Considerations

- **Care for Ancestors at new location**
- **Private secured access**
- **Altar**
- **Ancestor pole**
- **Offerings**
- **Regular communications and engagement**
- **Continued review of conservation treatments**

Lessons Learned

- **Genuine collaboration**
- **Not just collections but also relationships**
- **For the tribal community this case revealed the complexities of condition issues and treatment solutions**
- **Full disclosure is critical to achieving best decisions**
- **Culturally sensitive conservation and terminology**
- **Importance of interdepartmental collaboration**

Acknowledgements

- **Members of the Gabrielino (Tongva) Community**
- **Robert Dorame**, Gabrielino Tongva, MLD
- **Charlotte Eng**, Conservation Scientist, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
- **Mallory Furnier**, Special Projects Archivist, Braun Research Library, Autry Museum of the American West
- **LaLena Lewark**, Sr. Director Collections and Conservation, Autry Museum of the American West
- **Liza Posas**, Head Librarian and Archivist, Braun Research Library, Autry Museum of the American West
- **Marilyn Van Winkle**, Rights and Reproductions Coordinator, Autry Museum of the American West
- **Maggie Villareal and Samantha Lorenzo**, **Volunteers and Interns** that have assisted with the rehousing of the Sheldon Reservoir ancestors

Thank you