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ATALM annual conference on Indigenous Archives, Libraries, and Museums

Maitrayee Ghosh

Introduction

The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums (ATALM) is a non-profit organization formed by a group of native professionals in the year 2010, with a vision that every tribal nation will have its own archive, library and museum to house historical photographs, literature, songs, stories, treaties, legal history, ethnographies and traditional information pertaining to each tribe. ATALM provides culturally relevant training and services to the tribal libraries, archives and museums in USA, with major financial contribution received from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The five-member governing board and an advisory council are the two main bodies which constitute ATALM. The annual conferences are the important events due to the participation of tribal libraries and similar organizations engaged in up-lifting of indigenous populations. ATALM serves as an advocate for indigenous cultural institutions with tribal leaders, funders and government officials. It supports networking and provides key information for the directors, managers and staff of tribal cultural institutions. It maintains a network of support for indigenous programs, encourages collaboration among tribal and non-tribal cultural institutions and articulates contemporary issues related to developing and sustaining the cultural sovereignty of native nations. ATALM also conducts studies on tribal cultural institutions periodically.

The ATALM 2014 international conference was organized in partnership with federal IMLS which provided major support to this event. The IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the libraries and museums in the USA; the mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning and cultural and civic engagement. The IMLS supports ATALM to develop international network and collaboration among indigenous libraries, archives and museums worldwide and preserves indigenous cultures. The purpose of most tribal libraries is to provide the recreational reading materials of popular interest and act as community Information and Activities Center, Independent Learning Center, Research Center and Computer Access Center for the tribal communities.

Tribal libraries may also function as an archive, cultural centre or as the records management program for the tribal government. Added activities may include those designed to preserve the history and culture of the tribe (Patterson *et al.*, 2008).

The tribal libraries, archives and museums have following unique features:

- Tribal libraries, archives and museums are generally located in remote areas with limited information and communications technology infrastructure, training or resources. The collection includes sacred materials, tribal personal belongings, palm leaves, clay tablets, etc.
- Promotion and preservation of tribal culture, life ways, memory, institutional architecture/interior design and native language.
- The staff members are knowledgeable "cultural keepers" but may have limited experiences on library management and collection development.
- The funding sources are different in tribal libraries than public libraries in the USA. The majority of funding for indigenous libraries, archives and museums (LAMs) is from IMLS and tribal governments.

Tribal archival records include genealogical material, including tribal membership rolls, financial and legal records of individual tribal members and institutions, including documents that support legal claim (Roy and Alonzo, 2003):

> For me, it was once in a life time conference. As a first-timer, shy and new person, I found myself isolated and out of place, but I managed to adjust myself since we all have the common professional goals. The desert mountains, tree-lined canyons and hot springs are famous in Palm Springs [. . .]. I liked the swaying palm trees and mountains which is naturally resplendent.

## Conference venue, local culture and participants

The conference was held at the Renaissance Palm Springs hotel during the period June 9-12, 2014. The city of Palm Spring is known as a place with more than 350 days of sunshine, commonly called as place of "Fun in the Sun year-round". Now-a-days, Palm Springs and the surrounding areas are experiencing tremendous renaissance and developmental activities; nestled at the base of the majestic San Jacinto Mountains, the city is the ancestral home of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians is a federally recognized tribe of Cahuilla Indians. The Indian Canyons consisting of Palm Canyon, Murray Canyon and Andreas Canyon and the headquarters are in Palm Springs. The word "Cahuilla" means the "Masters" or "powerful ones"; the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla is an important player in the local economy and developmental process of the Palm Springs. The tribe is the city's largest collective landowner and owns

Indian Canyons in Palm Springs. The native tribes "Agua Caliente" is Spanish for hot waters, the hot springs that travel underground has been developed as popular Spa Resort Casino in Palm Springs. The Agua Caliente tribal members maintain a rich heritage and assert a progressive role in contemporary Palm Springs; they also contribute to the community by employing thousands of people in hotels, casinos, spas and other places such as the Indian Canyons and Agua Caliente Cultural Museum. The attendees list includes archivists, museum curators, practicing librarians, project coordinators, directors, accomplished authors, writers, artists, professors, students, native and non-native working on indigenous people.

There were participants from around 30 states in the USA, including Washington DC; the highest number of delegates was from California (little more than 100); New Mexico was the second highest state followed by Arizona; the author is the lone participant from Florida State.

The delegates shared operational lessons and discussed how LAMs can drive change; the major topics discussed are preservation, collections care, digitization, access protocols, project management, academic outreach, language revitalization, archives operations, staff development and literacy. The conference tracks also included specialized topics such as cultural tourism, exhibit production, advocacy, digital storytelling, oral history projects, endangered languages and disaster risk management (DRM) (Figure 1).
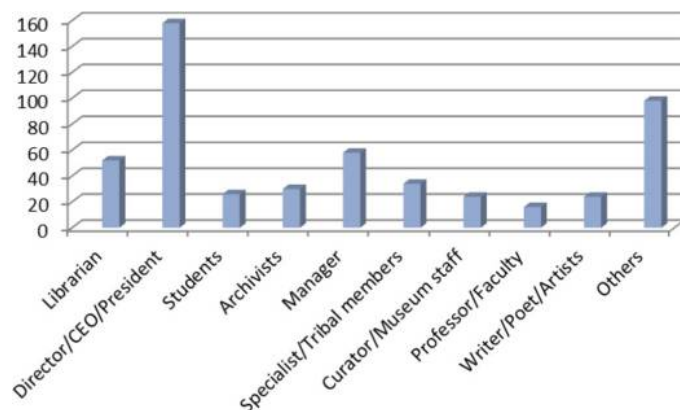
Opening ceremony and poster session

The opening ceremony took place at the Oasis Ballroom on 10th June with a welcome note from Letitia Chambers, ATALM Board of Directors and Conference Chair, who greeted the participants in the opening session.

An informative and inspirational remark was delivered by W. Richard West, Conference Honorary Chair. He mentioned that "ATALM embodies a fundamental aspect [. . .] that indigenous peoples must sustain the cultural sovereignty of their own native nations".

The conference followed tribal cultural protocols, such as each day opening ceremony and breakfast with a prayer. There were blessings from senior tribal members and Cahuilla elder Ernest Siva, who played the melodious flute during opening session.

On June 11, a keynote address by Jim Enote entitled "A Witness to Change" was presented wherein he inspired the audience through his dedication to indigenous community, leadership qualities and his unique naming of himself as an "interrupted artist".

The exhibitors represented by library and archives related production units, services offered on technology solutions, software, risk management, preservation strategies and many more. There were around 50 posters displayed at the convention centre, from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the American Library Association, Berkeley University Heritage Preservation, Inc., and the University of Arizona Knowledge River Program, which were

presented during the session. All the posters remained in place through the end of the conference:

> The sessions at ATALM differ greatly from other academic or professional conferences in terms of topic and focus area; rather than listen to and concentrate on continuous presentations, I preferred to attend selected workshops to strengthen skills so that the lesson learned can be put into practice.

Onsite workshops

The author attended pre-conference workshops on "Preservation planning, archives processing for small sized collection" – a full-day workshop on June 9 on "Digital Imaging for small Libraries, Archives and Museums" conducted by Tom Rieger, Director of Imaging Services, Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC). The workshop discussed the tools necessary to create affordable and easy-to-use digitization stations, incorporating cameras, scanners and the software needed to operate efficiently and to operate at nationally accepted standards. Tom Rieger explained the careful handling of rare and fragile cultural heritage materials, and their workflow procedures which are designed to enhance efficiency as well as high quality.

The workshop was suitable for participants with following problems:

- limited staff and time for large film reformatting projects;
- frustrated by the snail's pace of flatbed scanner;
- nervous about working with nitrate negatives; and
- overwhelmed by other projects that demand attention;

There was discussion on archival standards for digitization; NEDCC follows Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative (FADGI) technical guidelines, methods and practices. The FADGI defines common guidelines, methods and practices for digitizing historical materials; participants understood necessary steps for successful digitization projects. The NEDCC also provides disaster assistance, and staff members are available for 24/7 telephone advice to

Figure 1. *Profession wise distribution of conference participants*

institutions and individuals handling collection-related disasters. There was discussion on online disaster planning tool: NEDCC and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners partnered to create dPlan, a free online program to help institutions write comprehensive disaster plans. dPlan provides an easy-to-use template that allows museums, libraries, archives and other cultural institutions of all sizes to develop a customized plan. The dPlan can serve the needs of small institutions without in-house preservation staff, library and museum systems that need to develop separate but related plans for multiple locations and state agencies that need to structure training programs on disaster planning.

On June 11, "Decontamination and Integrated Pest Management" by Amanda Hudson, the senior service manager of Chickasaw Nation, discussed decontamination and the use of integrated pest management system for mixed collections. The basic housekeeping and security, monitoring, various methods of decontamination and integrated pest management at the Holisso: The Research Center for the Study of Chickasaw History and Culture were elaborated.

Holisso: The Research Center for the Study of Chickasaw History and Culture is a specialty library focusing on the study of the Chickasaw Nation and other tribes in the Southeastern USA. The Center preserves archives, tales, culture, Native American language and historical accounts. The Research Center organizes Chickasaw and Southeastern genealogy and oral history workshops, digitization events, lecture series, conferences, round tables and book signings.

On the second half of the day June 11, another workshop entitled "Going Social with Advocacy: Building Support Using Social Media"by Michelle Harrell Washington, Director, ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services and John Amundsen, Program Officer, Outreach & Communications, ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services elaborated on "How to Use Social Media for Advocacy".

Today, almost all the libraries are using their Facebook page and Twitter for marketing and creating awareness of library services to huge number of people. Social media platforms are revolutionizing the way libraries can connect with the communities they serve. The attendees explored various means to expand advocacy through social media tools, namely, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, HootSuite, YouTube, Slideshare and Vine, and learn about effective social media strategies for integration with libraries' overall marketing strategy with no cost. The best practices in using social networking sites by libraries to better profile themselves and communicate effectively with their users was the centre point for this interactive session.

The topic generated lot of interest on how social media can help to reach help off-campus learner to create, connect and converse information. To reach a new audience of potential users, the resource persons provide tips for using social media for advocacy as follow:

- know your target population and connect with social media with a plan;
- understand the audience and then post because there will be competition from other posts;
- keep Facebook posts short and sweet, if possible with image;
- share links to press releases, images from events and other important information on regular basis; and
- it could be very exciting to create online news groups/forums, video sharing (YouTube), social networking (Facebook and MySpace), wikis, professional networking and blogging to empower new audience.

Concluding remarks

This was my first ATALM conference; the theme addressed the essential issues and problems that tribal communities are facing such as revitalizing native languages, learning and teaching about tribal histories and preserving cultural knowledge. The states where native languages are spoken, taught, promoted and most valued, such as Alaska, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico and California, participated with good number of delegates. Also, there was sizable number of participants from federal, state and tribal government, as well as artisans.

There were around 170 speakers presented in this conference. An interesting poetry session was organized during lunch time on June 11, which included a variety of topics with a special mention about India and the UK.

Today's LAMs are developing new ways to maximize the use of educational and economic opportunities for their clients. Thus, conference like this organized wide variety of workshops, site visits and open forums, and the LAM professionals shared experiences on lessons learned from partnerships and indigenous ways of knowing which will help the non-tribal participants and organizations deal effectively with collections and services.

NOTES

E-rate and tribal libraries, available at: http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7521223208

FADGI, available at: www.digitizationguidelines.gov/

Institute of museum and Library services, available at: www.imls.gov/

ATALM 2014 Conference Program, available at: www.atalm.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%20PROGRAM.pdf

REFERENCES

Patterson, L., Engstrom, C., Sampson, Z., Feller, S., Webster, K., Hanks, S. and Littletree, S. (2008), *Tribal Library Procedures Manual*, 3rd ed., available at: www.ala.org/offices/sites/ala.org.offices/files/content/olos/toolkits/TRAILS3.pdf

Roy, L. and Alonzo, D.L. (2003), "Perspectives on tribal archives", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 422-427.

FURTHER READING

The Tribal Libraries, Archives, and Museums (TLAM) Project, available at: http://hacklibraryschool.com/2013/11/12/the-tribal-libraries-archives-and-museums-tlam-project/

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