



2024
ANNUAL REPORT

Repatriation Activities at the Smithsonian Institution

Contents of Annual Report 2024

- 3** Repatriation and the Smithsonian:
An Overview
- 4** Repatriation Activities: Year at a Glance
- 10** Oversight of Repatriation Activities
- 12** Highlighted Repatriation Activities
- 17** Additional Information

Repatriation and the Smithsonian

An Overview

The Smithsonian Institution has a long and successful history conducting respectful repatriations of Native American human remains and certain cultural items to their communities of origin. Prior to the passage of federal repatriation legislation, the Smithsonian engaged in such returns, including the voluntary return of human remains in the early 1980s and the well-known return of certain cultural objects affiliated to the Pueblo of Zuni in 1987.

In 1989, Congress enacted the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAIA). This law established the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) as part of the Smithsonian Institution and authorized the transfer of the collections from the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation in New York City to the Smithsonian. The NMAIA was also the first piece of federal legislation to address the repatriation of Native American human remains and funerary objects. The NMAIA requires the Smithsonian to return, upon request, Native American human remains and funerary objects to culturally affiliated federally recognized Indian tribes. The NMAIA was amended in 1996 to include the return of certain Native American cultural objects, including sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony. To assist in the repatriation process, both the NMAI and National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) have repatriation policies and procedures.

The Smithsonian has repatriated or made available for repatriation the human remains of more than 7,500 individuals, 255,000 funerary objects, and 1,600 sacred objects and/or objects of cultural patrimony. These totals for repatriation far exceed any other museum complex in the United States. The Smithsonian is committed to the repatriation and consultation process with Indian tribes throughout the nation. This report to Congress will be sent to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, Congressional Regents, and the Government Accountability Office. It will also be posted on the repatriation websites of the NMNH and NMAI.

Repatriation Activities: Year at a Glance

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Human Remains and Funerary Objects Available for Repatriation or That Have Been Repatriated by the NMNH

	CY 2024 ¹	TOTAL ²
Human Remains ³		
Number of Individuals	73	6,989
Catalog Numbers	110	6,423
Funerary Objects (Associated and Unassociated) ⁴		
Total Object Count	445	225,971
Total Catalog Numbers	74	3,907

1. CY 2024 lists the human remains and objects made available for repatriation during the calendar year. NMNH is actively reviewing its statistics, particularly those from early reports. The updated counts reflect the results of this ongoing process.

2. Total lists the number of Native American human remains and objects repatriated or made available for repatriation within the United States, through time, including CY 2024.

3. At the NMNH, *Human Remains* mean the physical remains of a human body of a person of Native American ancestry. The *Number of Individuals* refers to the minimum number of individuals or MNI, a concept commonly used in anthropology to represent the fewest possible number of individuals represented by a skeletal assemblage. *Catalog Numbers* refer to the quantity of museum numbers assigned to the human remains or objects.

4. *Funerary Objects* refer to an “object that, as part of a death rite or ceremony of a culture, is intentionally placed with individual human remains either at the time of burial or later.” NMAIA, 20 U.S.C. §80q-14.

Objects of Cultural Patrimony and Sacred Objects
Repatriated by the NMNH

	CY 2024	TOTAL
Objects of Cultural Patrimony ⁵		
Total Object Count	0	1
Total Catalog Numbers	0	1
Sacred Objects ⁶		
Total Object Count	0	54
Total Catalog Numbers	0	16
Other Items ⁷		
Total Object Count	0	24
Total Catalog Numbers	0	27

5. *Objects of Cultural Patrimony* mean items “having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group (Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization) or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual.” NMAIA Amendments of 1996, 20 U.S.C. 80q-9a.

6. *Sacred Objects* mean items that are “specific ceremonial objects which are needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of traditional Native American religions by their present-day adherents.” NMAIA Amendments of 1996, 20 U.S.C. 80q-9a.

7. *Other Items* refer to circumstances in which the cultural item offered for repatriation does not meet the definition of an object available for repatriation under the NMAIA or the policy of the NMNH. Since the NMAIA was not intended to limit the authority of the Smithsonian to conduct repatriations of certain items from its collections, the category of *Other Items* was developed to track and monitor NMNH museum collections offered for return for which no other repatriation category is available or appropriate.

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PHOTO: ALAN KARCHER FOR NMAI

Human Remains and Funerary Objects Repatriated by the NMAI

	CY 2024	TOTAL ⁸
Human Remains ⁹		
Total Count ¹⁰	0	572
Total Catalog Numbers	0	268
Human Remains and Associated Funerary Objects ¹¹		
Total Object Count	0	45
Total Catalog Numbers	0	42
Funerary Objects (Associated and Unassociated) ¹²		
Total Object Count	0	29,679
Total Catalog Numbers	0	1,028

8. Total figures for NMAI include repatriations to tribes in the United States, First Nations in Canada, and Indigenous communities in Latin America.

9. At the NMAI *Human Remains* mean the physical remains of a human body, or any part thereof, whether or not naturally shed, freely given, or culturally modified. In some contexts, human hair may be considered human remains. For purposes of this policy, it is assumed that all human remains in the collection are of Native American ancestry unless otherwise known (NMAI Repatriation Policy 2022).

10. Historically, the NMAI did not assess the minimum number of individuals (MNI) but used other methods, including counts of individual elements, counts of the number of bone fragments, and other counting standards. The NMAI uses this legacy data for numerical consistency and, when possible, also calculates MNI in its case documentation.

11. This includes human remains and accompanying burial objects that are counted and cataloged together.

12. *Funerary Objects* are identified as a part of the death rite or ceremony of a culture reasonably believed to have been placed with individual human remains either at the time of death or later (NMAI Repatriation Policy 2022).

Objects of Cultural Patrimony and Sacred Objects
Repatriated by the NMAI

	CY 2024	TOTAL
Objects of Cultural Patrimony¹³		
Total Object Count	0	19
Total Catalog Numbers	0	9
Sacred Objects¹⁴		
Total Object Count	1	1,156
Total Catalog Numbers	1	946
Objects of Cultural Patrimony/Sacred Objects		
Total Object Count	0	432
Total Catalog Numbers	0	358

Unethically or Illegally Acquired Objects
Returned by the NMAI

	CY 2024	TOTAL
Objects Acquired Illegally¹⁵		
Total Object Count	0	31
Total Catalog Numbers	0	26

13. *Objects of Cultural Patrimony* are objects having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Indian Tribe or Native Hawaiian Organization or culture, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual regardless of whether the individual is a member of the Indian Tribe or Native Hawaiian Organization. The given object shall have been considered inalienable by the Indian Tribe or Native Hawaiian Organization at the time the object was separated from said group (NMAI Repatriation Policy 2022).

14. *Sacred Objects* are objects needed by traditional Native American religious leaders for the practice of Native American religions, including objects needed for the renewal of a religious practice (NMAI Repatriation Policy 2022).

15. *Objects Unethically or Illegally Acquired* refers to the longstanding Smithsonian policy stating that items that have been “stolen, unscientifically gathered or excavated, unethically acquired, or unlawfully exported from their country of origin should not be made part of Smithsonian collections” (SD 600, 2020, Section 9.2).

The NMAI Act and its 1996 amendment address repatriation only to federally recognized Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations within the United States. However, in accordance with its mission and in recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the NMAI considers repatriation requests for human remains, associated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony by Indigenous communities outside of the United States on a case-by-case basis. The following table lists the countries outside of the United States where the NMAI has conducted repatriations.

International Repatriation at the NMAI

	Year	Province	Country
1	1992	British Columbia	Canada
2	1995	Pichincha	Ecuador
3	1996	Ontario	Canada
4	1996	Cusco	Peru
5	1997	Ontario	Canada
6	1997	Alberta	Canada
7	1997	Ontario	Canada
8	1998	British Columbia	Canada
9	1998	Ontario	Canada
10	1998	Ontario	Canada
11	1999	Alberta	Canada
12	2000	Alberta	Canada
13	2002	British Columbia	Canada
14	2002	Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, Pinar del Río	Cuba
15	2002	British Columbia	Canada
16	2007	Alberta	Canada
17	2007	Alberta	Canada
18	2007	El Loa	Chile
19	2007	Arica	Chile
20	2008	Ontario	Canada
21	2012	Ontario	Canada
22	2014	Ontario	Canada
23	2016	Ontario	Canada
24	2021	Alberta	Canada
25	2021	Ontario	Canada
26	2022	Ontario	Canada
27	2023	Alberta	Canada
28	2023	Pichincha	Ecuador
29	2023	Manabí	Ecuador
30	2023	Esmeraldas	Canada

ADDITIONAL REPATRIATION ACTIVITIES AT THE NMNH AND THE NMAI

CY 2024 Tribal Repatriation Visits: Repatriation Consultation Visits and SI Sponsored Visits

	NMNH	NMAI	Joint NMNH-NMAI
Repatriation Consultation Visits¹⁶			
Number of Representatives	15	16	5
Number of Tribes	6	5	1
Smithsonian-sponsored Repatriation Visits			
Number of Representatives	6	9	5
Number of Tribes	6	2	1

16. The Smithsonian under certain circumstances funds the travel of tribal representatives to visit the Smithsonian as part of the repatriation process. Sponsored visits at the NMNH include both consultation and repatriation visit totals.

17. For NMAI, *Completed Repatriation Reports* refer to the total number of assessments. This includes reports, addenda, and/or memoranda that have resolved repatriation cases. Due to the complexity of repatriation claims, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between reports and *Completed Repatriations*. A single report may address more than one claim and/or result in multiple repatriations. Conversely, a single repatriation may be the result of multiple claims and/or reports.

18. For NMAI, *Completed Repatriations* refer to the events where items have been physically returned to tribes, First Nations, or communities.

Claims, Reports, and Repatriations

	NMNH		NMAI	
	CY 2024	TOTAL	CY 2024	TOTAL
Claims				
Claims Received	6	22	6	18
Reports and Repatriations				
Completed Repatriation Reports ¹⁷	4	162	5	121
Completed Repatriations ¹⁸	4	132	1	125

Oversight of Repatriation Activities

NATIVE AMERICAN REPATRIATION REVIEW COMMITTEE— NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The Repatriation Review Committee met in person at NMNH on May 8 and 9. A second in-person meeting took place on November 18 and 19. The committee comprises individuals nominated by tribes, tribal organizations, and scientific and museum organizations. The seven-member committee consists of Jamie Arsenault (Chair), former THPO and Repatriation Representative and Archives Manager, White Earth Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe; Irene Dundas (Vice Chair), Cultural Heritage Specialist, Ketchikan Indian Community; Kathleen Marshall (Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians); Vincas Steponaitis, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina; George Milner, Department of Anthropology, Pennsylvania State University; and Bonnie Styles, Executive Director of the Association of Science Museum Directors. Gordon Yellowman (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes) was appointed to the committee to serve in one position reserved for a Native American Traditional Religious Leader. George Milner completed his term on the committee and was thanked for his service at the Winter 2024 meeting.

George Milner (L) and Repatriation
Office Tribal Liaison Eric Hollinger



REPATRIATION COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES—NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

The NMAI Board of Trustees meets three times annually to address museum business, including repatriation matters presented by the NMAI Repatriation Committee. Members of the committee are appointed for two-year terms. As needed, the Repatriation Committee also holds additional meetings outside of the full board sessions to complete their work. The NMAI Repatriation Committee consists of Committee Chair Julie Fate Sullivan (Koyukon Athabascan), Johnson Cerda (Kichwa of the Ecuadorian Amazon), G. Peter Jemison (Seneca Nation), Emil' Keme (K'iche' Maya Nation), Elaine F. Peters (Ak-Chin Indian Community), Angela Riley (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), Shari Huhndorf (Yup'ik), Brian Vallo (Pueblo of Acoma), and Leslie Wheelock (Oneida Nation).



Julie Fate Sullivan
(Koyukon Athabascan)



Johnson Cerda
(Kichwa of the
Ecuadorian Amazon)



G. Peter Jemison
(Seneca Nation)



Emil' Keme
(K'iche' Maya Nation)



Elaine F. Peters
(Ak-Chin Indian
Community)



Angela Riley (Citizen
Potawatomi Nation)



Shari Huhndorf
(Yup'ik)



Brian Vallo
(Pueblo of Acoma)



Leslie Wheelock
(Oneida Nation)

Highlighted Repatriation Activities

Collaboration

The NMAI and NMNH have initiated efforts within their repatriation programs to strengthen collaboration in key areas such as consultations, shared collections, and overlapping case research. Through this partnership, both institutions aim to provide tribal representatives with a more comprehensive and coordinated experience during on-site visits. By pooling their resources and expertise, NMAI and NMNH will work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of case research, ultimately ensuring cultural affiliation determinations are made as accurately and promptly as possible.

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New Staff in the NMNH Repatriation Office

In 2024, the Repatriation Office hired three tribal liaisons, each assigned cases based on their expertise and experience. The new tribal liaisons are Matthew Sanger, Marissa Shaver, and Kevin Pierce Wright.

Matthew Sanger earned his PhD in anthropology from Columbia University and has worked in various roles within museums, including the American Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, for the last eighteen years. He has experience working with Native American communities in California, New York, and across the southeastern United States.

Marissa Shaver earned her PhD from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Trained as a cultural anthropologist, she has experience in archaeology and has worked at multiple museums in various roles since 2011. She has worked with communities in northwestern Mexico, the Southwest, the Great Lakes, and the Northeast.

Kevin (Pierce) Wright is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma. As part of his graduate education, Pierce has spent nearly eight years collaborating with Indigenous communities in North America on projects related to archaeology and historic preservation. Pierce has worked in several regions of

Representatives from the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians viewing collections at the NMNH



the United States, including Alaska, the Great Plains, the Southeast, and the Mid-Atlantic.

Consultations

Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians (September 2024)

The Repatriation Offices of the NMNH and NMAI hosted a visit from representatives of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians. Kathleen Marshall, a citizen of the Chumash tribe, also represented the Smithsonian's Repatriation Review Committee in viewing collections from Chumash homelands in Southern California, which include the northern Channel Islands. The visiting delegation provided critical information about the context of some of the collections as well as details about the collectors that were not in Smithsonian files.

Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation (January 2024)

Representatives from the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation visited NMNH to view object collections and archival materials at the National Anthropological Archives (NAA). The visit was highly focused on 3D digitization methods to enable Northwestern Band of Shoshone community members to have greater access to the items. This visit was a collaborative effort between the Repatriation Office, Recovering Voices, Smithsonian's Digital Program Office, and Department of Anthropology collections staff. As a result of this visit, NMNH Tribal Liaison Marissa Shaver was invited to attend the 161st memorial ceremony for the Bear River Massacre in Preston, Idaho. This visit was highly significant given that in 2013 the NMNH Repatriation Office repatriated two individuals who were killed during the Bear River Massacre to the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation.

Panoramic view of the Bear River Massacre site in Preston, Idaho





San Ildefonso representatives meeting with the NMNH leadership

San Ildefonso Pueblo (October 2024)

Four community members of the San Ildefonso Pueblo and their Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) visited the NMNH for an onsite consultation. This group was greeted by the NMNH Sant Director, Kirk Johnson, and the Associate Director for Collections and Science, Rebecca Johnson. In addition to receiving an introduction to the museum, its collections, and archival materials at the NAA, the group discussed NMNH's repatriation process and the tribe's active request. They also discussed traditional care for collections and archival materials.

Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians (October 2024)

The museum repatriated 304 funerary objects to the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians in Orland, California. The items had been collected from the Brownell Indian Cemetery in 1962 and were found to be culturally affiliated with the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians and the Grindstone Indian Rancheria of Wintun-Wailaki Indians of California. NMNH Repatriation Office Tribal Liaison Eric Hollinger traveled to California and transferred the objects to Laverne Bill, Repatriation Representative for the Paskenta Band. Hollinger then participated in a reburial in Glenn County, California, of remains and funerary objects being repatriated from the Army Corps of Engineers, California State University at Sacramento, and the University of California, Berkeley.

Eric Hollinger, NMNH Repatriation Office Tribal Liaison, with Laverne Bill, Repatriation Representative for the Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians, after the reburial of remains and funerary objects at Black Butte Reservoir, California



(L-R) Farrell, Rollie, and Ferlin Knight of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation visiting the NMAI Cultural Resources Center before returning home with their belongings



(L-R) Members of the Knight family visiting with collections affiliated with the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation under NMAI stewardship

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Repatriation staff continued to conduct research on multiple repatriation cases, attend both virtual and in-person conferences and trainings, and find areas of collaboration through museum panel discussions focused on current repatriation events and challenges. A selection of repatriation activities undertaken during the year is highlighted here.

Repatriation

Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation (June 2024)

The NMAI recently repatriated a bundle component, identified as a sacred object, to a lineal descendant of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. The repatriation efforts were initiated by two generations of family members who worked to locate this missing bundle component and return it for ceremonial use. With the support of the lineal descendant's siblings and their families, the cultural item was brought home and used in a tribal ceremony shortly after its repatriation.

Consultations

Gitxaala Nation, British Columbia, Canada (May 2024)

A delegation from the Gitxaala First Nation visited the NMAI's Cultural Resource Center to initiate a partnership aimed at supporting tribal members in the development of the Gitxaala Nation's cultural center. This included a repatriation consultation, as well as discussions on community loans, shared stewardship, and ethical returns. The Gitxaala Nation is building a combined cultural center and traditional longhouse, and collaborating with seventeen

Members of the Gitxaala Nation with Repatriation Department and Office of Outreach and Engagement Department staff during their visit to the NMAI Cultural Resources Center



Rosa Mercedes Huelchulaf Cayuqueo continues to collaborate with the Kiñelmapu Koyawe Repatriation Commission on various initiatives involving engagement with NMAI staff, specifically concerning collections affiliated with the Mapuche



museums across the United States, Canada, and Europe that have items from the Gitxaala Nation in their collections. The goal is to reunite cultural items in the new cultural center, and to organize a homecoming event once the cultural center is complete.

Mapuche Territory Kiñelmapu Kowaye, Chile (April 2024)

In April 2024, members of the Kiñelmapu Koyawe Repatriation Commission conducted a collections review of cultural items held under the stewardship of NMAI. The visit was part of their ongoing collaboration with museum staff to update collections documentation and strengthen shared understanding. During the consultation, the delegation engaged deeply with the collection—referred to as *mogen* (living beings)—and participated in in-depth discussions focused on repatriation, shared stewardship, and ethical returns. These conversations aimed to clarify museum protocols and explore pathways for future collaboration.

The Kiñelmapu Koyawe Repatriation Commission is working in close coordination with NMAI, communities within the Mapuche Territory of Kiñelmapu Koyawe, and Chilean government representatives to assess the potential return of funerary items currently under the museum’s care.



Members of the Kiñelmapu Koyawe Repatriation Commission viewing collections; (L-R) Leonardo Andrés Yevilao Liempi, Alex Marcelo Calfuqueo Calfucura, Romina Luz Treumún Huenchulaf, and Mauricio Ismael Reyes Soto

Additional Information

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Repatriation Websites

NMNH Repatriation:

<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/research/anthropology/programs/repatriation-office>

NMNH Guidelines and Procedures for Repatriation:

<https://naturalhistory.si.edu/sites/default/files/media/file/repatriation-guidelines-and-procedures-2012.pdf>

NMAI Repatriation:

<https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/repatriation>

NMAI Repatriation Policy:

<https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/repatriation/NMAI-Repatriation-Policy-2022-r.pdf>

Smithsonian Collections Search Center:

<https://collections.si.edu/search/>

