Repatriating Nunavik-based international archives for Nunavimmiut: experiences of Avataq

Sarah Gauntlett, Archivist and Librarian, Avataq Cultural Institute

Closer to home: Locating and retrieving Indigenous heritage from archives outside of Canada
Winnipeg, March 6, 2019
Avataq Cultural Institute: Inuit cultural organization of Nunavik

• Est. 1980; predecessor: TIKI (Taqramiut Ilisarnngniliriningat Kupaip Inunginnut), founded ca. 1977 by Johnny Epoo and Kativik School Board, to record and pass on Inuit culture; lack of cultural provision in JBNQA.

• Mandate determined at biennial Nunavik Inuit Elders Conferences (1st in 1981): to protect and promote the language and culture of Nunavimmiut.

• Inuit Board of Directors (elected); Local Cultural Committees

• Head office in Inukjuak, admin. office in Montreal.

• Depts: Archeology; Museology; Arts Secretariat; Research, Archives & Documentation, incl. Genealogy, Translation, Publications, Doc Centre); Nunatop; Theatre; etc.
INUTTIGUT PIRRUSIIT
DOCUMENTATION AND
ARCHIVES CENTRE
Inuttigut Pirusiit Documentation Centre

• Acquiring, preserving, & providing access to documentary heritage of Nunavik;
• providing research assistance to Inuit individuals and regional organizations, plus wide array of researchers and producers;
• providing archival management and consultation services to Nunavik government and community organizations;
• managing a library collection comprising approx. 10,000+ published documents;
• curating an ever-growing archival collection incl. thousands of oral history and sound recordings; 35,000+ historical photos; audiovisual recordings; manuscripts and textual materials; drawings; maps; as well as copies of relevant archival materials held by other institutions across Canada and internationally.
• approx. 230+ archival fonds / collections
Avataq Doc Centre: international archives

- approx. 25 fonds acquired from outside Canada (this doesn’t include people who immigrated to Canada before their time in Nunavik, nor research projects that included intl. researchers)

- Sources (donors /“record creators”):
  - Nunavimmiut, qallunaat;
  - institutional archives and museums (public & corporate/private);
  - educational institutions;
  - research projects; religious orgs. esp. Oblates; many individuals who lived in/travelled to Nunavik for work, e.g., fur trade employees, gov’t agents, police officers, teachers, doctors/nurses; researchers; etc.)
Inuit History Project (ca. 1985-1988)

- Project proposed by Makivik in 1980s to document the history of Nunavimmiut and Nunavik. Never got funded, but lots of documentation already collected. Formed part of foundation of Avataq Doc Centre in 1985.
- Other foundations incl. Nunavik oral history projects, and historical photo research initially conducted by Dorothy Harley Eber (first 1000 photos).
- Reams of letters sent; range from success to no response
- Personal contacts proved key to securing records
- Keep up correspondence via phone calls, in-person visiting, to pursue and sustain collaborative efforts, knowledge sharing
Some intl. donors to Avataq (examples)

- France: Marie Roué; Marion Cirfélice, Véronique Antomarchi; Bernard Saladin d'Anglure + collaborators, e.g., Yves Bernier
- Belgium: Father Kees Verspeek, OMI
- England: Mary Cowley, Nicolas Little
- USA: Nelson H.H. Graburn aka Apirqu Nilisi (California, Berkeley); George Quimby (Burke Museum of Natural History); John Joseph Honigmann (Smithsonian); Julie Ann Albert Schroeder
- Mexico: Dr. William Breen Murray
- Germany: Margaret Rea Alkema
- Japan: Nobuhiro Kishigami; Keishi Omura; Sachiko Kubota
- New Zealand: William E. Willmott
Some intl. acquisitions of Avataq (institutions)

• Revillon Frères (Paris) & Robert & Frances Flaherty Study Center (California)
• Smithsonian Institution (Washington)
• Dartmouth College – Elmer Harp Jr. (New Hampshire)
• Canadian Museum of History (Asen Balikci – Turkey, Bulgaria, Switzerland, USA, etc.; Nelson Graburn – in England, California)
• George Comer Collection, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. (Connecticut)
Flaherty photos: Revillon Frères, Paris; Robert & Frances Flaherty Studies Centre, Claremont
Avataq has copies of 63 Honigmann photos, taken in Kuujjuaaraapik, 1949-1950.

Request to use photo in book on Rev. E.J. Peck --> track down provenance, verify copyright status (Avataq db had vague ref. to Canadian Museum of History).


Smithsonian Media Archivist in charge of rights and reproductions: “Copyright is enacted to protect the creator so it’s the nationality of the creator rather than the place of creation that matters for copyright. Honigmann died in 1977 so we’ve got until 2047... copyright is the least important of all the issues surrounding Honigmann’s papers...”
John Joseph Honigmann, NAA (cont.)

- Toby Morantz copied them in 1994 from originals then kept by Honigmann’s son David whom she met when she in North Carolina
- David Denton got copies from Smithsonian curator for *Mind’s Eye: Stories from Whapmagoostui* (Aanischaukamikw, 2014)
- Copyright law in Canada (where the photos were taken): previously, photos passed into public domain 50 years after author’s death; in USA, 70 years; for published photos, 95 years...
- Whose law applies in cross-border situations? The law of the country where the work is being used (Jean Dryden, *Demystifying Copyright* (CLA, 2014)).
- With the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement replacing NAFTA as of October 2018, Canada agreed to extend copyright to 70 years as well.
- Smithsonian offered to send cell phone photos of contact sheets so Avataq could select which further photos we would like to order copies of (payment required); no longer had a digital imaging specialist on staff; only other option to go there in person during opening hours.
- Last contact Feb. 18, 2018: would need follow-up.
Elmer Harp Jr. – New Hampshire
Searching, visiting, repatriating what was taken from Inuit

- *Inuit Piqutingit (What Belongs to Inuit)*
  http://www.isuma.tv/isuma-productions/inuit-piqutingit

- Nature of Things episode: *Trapped in a Human Zoo*

- “Do we need to be thankful these things were taken from us, so that they could be preserved?”
Implementing existing strategies and protocols

- Protocols for Native American Archival Materials
  - Inform communities about collections of relevant materials
  - Establish partnerships and document agreements
  - Develop culturally responsive policies, practices and services according to community priorities and protocols
  - Guidelines on copying and repatriation of records to Indigenous communities

- National Inuit Strategy on Research priority areas:
  1. Advance Inuit governance in research
  2. Enhance the ethical conduct of research
  3. Align funding with Inuit research priorities
  4. Ensure Inuit access, ownership, and control over data and info
  5. Build capacity in Inuit Nunangat research
Problems and questions

- Ethics of document access, privacy and reproduction: copyright, other kinds of rights, and informed consent
  - e.g., Nicholas Little fonds, Bernard Saladin d’Anglure, HBCA employee files (genealogy)
  - Problematic to require Indigenous communities to seek out and pay for copies of materials that belong/relate to them.
  - Get to know the rules so as to be able to challenge them when necessary, change them to be more just
  - Dialogue and share work on access policies development

- Digital repatriation vs. physical repatriation
  - digital network-based systems do not function well in the North
  - need more support for systems design and maintenance
  - demand for physical, recirculated, “old” documents
  - need/desire for physical repositories in the North; needs support from all sides to carry out, revisiting economic models
  - budget human resources for in-person interpretive services and research assistance, no matter what the media
Potential for long-term cooperative efforts

- Inuit-specific heritage network
- Skin Clothing Online: website including dynamic 3D records of historic skin clothing from circumpolar regions, held in museums in Denmark, Greenland, Norway, England, etc.
- 5th Thule Expedition Atlas: cybercartographic atlas to digitally repatriate knowledge and objects of the expedition (1921-1924) [https://thuleatlas.org/](https://thuleatlas.org/)
- Upcoming Inuit Studies Conference (Oct. 2019, Montreal) session co-hosted by Pitquhirnikkut Ilihatiniq and Nunavut Arctic College Media: bring together people/orgs engaged in development and management of digitized Inuit collections in the Canadian Arctic
- Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and Inuit Heritage Trust working on a Nunavut Heritage Centre to house repatriated Nunavut artifacts from around the world
- Nunatsiavut: Tradition & Transition project
- Canadian Museum of History: overarching licensing agreement; proposed collaboration with Avataq, CMH, and Nunavut Arctic College to cooperate on digitizing materials and knowledge exchange (correct harmful/missing descriptions, mediating between non-Indigenous archival institutions & communities)
Nakurmiik!