

Native American Voices Today

This special issue of *Expedition* is an extension of our new exhibition, *Native American Voices: The People—Here and Now*, and highlights Native American sovereignty through the work of some of today's most talented Native leaders, several of whom are here at Penn.

Native Americans hold a special status in our country as members of sovereign Nations. These essays explain that status and share stories of Native America's ongoing tribulations and vitality. A century has passed since our early Board member, George Gustav Heye, installed his own Native American collection in our galleries. That was the "Golden Age of Museums," when directors eagerly amassed specimens from Native peoples struggling to hold on to their cultural ideals. Today, a century later, Native American activism has reshaped museums like ours. We now hold legal obligations to Native communities and follow a collaborative agenda on a more even playing field. As our new exhibition shows, these collaborations often result in deeper understandings and renewed relationships. We owe a debt of gratitude to indigenous Americans for initiating this perspective.

Three Native scholars served as touchstones for me in organizing this project. Louis Shotridge, the Museum's early Tlingit Assistant Curator, identified Penn as a safe haven in which to harbor his Tlingit regalia against the onrushing tide of modernity. Were Shotridge alive today he would likely be thrilled to hear Tlingit voices in our new exhibition hall and would champion the exhibit's collaborative spirit. Forty years later, in 1969, Vine Deloria, Jr., the influential Lakota scholar, harshly criticized anthropologists for fostering stereotypes that lead to misguided government policy. Deloria's critique underlies my resolve that the Penn Museum should engage its audiences with resounding issues from source communities. Finally, Gerald Vizenor, the prolific Anishinaabe writer and a consultant on the exhibition, urges us to recognize



Lucy Fowler Williams (right) co-produced five short films for the Penn Museum's *Native American Voices: The People—Here and Now* with Hopi journalist Patty Talahongva, seen here together on location in Alaska.

Native Americans in the active present. His insistence on *survivance* through the telling of today's stories has profoundly shaped this project.

In Philadelphia it is easy to feel distanced from Indian Country, but *Native American Voices* reminds us that the collections we steward are still very much alive in Native communities near and far. Over 70 Native colleagues have contributed to the exhibition, and four advisors helped shape its words and content. I am grateful to each of them, to our talented Museum staff, to the underwriters who made the exhibition possible, and to these authors who, as cultural ambassadors, have so generously shared their voices and aspirations with us.

LUCY FOWLER WILLIAMS, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE CURATOR AND SABLOFF SENIOR KEEPER
OF COLLECTIONS, AMERICAN SECTION