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Authors

Biggs, Bonnie
Herlihy, Catherine S.

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The Luiseño Culture Bank Project: From Museum Shelves to HyperCard

BONNIE BIGGS AND CATHERINE S. HERLIHY

On a small reservation in rural San Diego County, tribal elders, progressive administrators, university librarians, and technical advisors have forged a collaborative partnership to preserve the Luiseño cultural heritage. In the 1970s, Luiseño elders and volunteers secured a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to fund a project involving the gathering of secondary information on Luiseño artifacts and information from a variety of museums, libraries, and private collections. Following up on the creation of the Luiseño Culture Bank, university librarians from California State University, San Marcos, are now engaged in a project that eventually will mount this "bank" onto a HyperCard database.

The San Luiseño Band of Mission Indians derive their name from their association with Mission San Luis Rey in northern San Diego County.¹ Established in 1798 by Franciscan fathers, Mission San Luis Rey is known as the "king of the missions." However, the treatment of the native peoples by Spanish missionaries was anything but royal. Contact between native peoples and Europeans had a devastating effect on the social, cultural, and economic life of the Indians. Within sixty-five years of the arrival of Junipero Serra in 1769, the population of California Indians was reduced by

Bonnie Biggs is senior assistant librarian, coordinator for public services, and assistant to the director, Library Services, California State University, San Marcos. Catherine S. Herlihy is senior assistant librarian and cataloging and systems librarian, Library Services, California State University, San Marcos.

two-thirds as a result of disease, overwork, and capital punishment.² Mission Indians under Franciscan control were usually malnourished. They were severely punished if they tried to escape, and the women often were raped. Subsequent periods of domination by Mexico (1821 to 1848) and then by the United States further diminished native populations and compounded cultural displacement.³

In 1875, President Grant issued an executive order setting aside land in San Diego County for the exclusive use of Native Americans. However, most reservations were not formally established until the 1890s. Currently, eighteen reservations are located in the county of San Diego, more than in any other county in the United States. Four tribal groups are indigenous to the region: Luiseño, Diegueño, Cahuilla, and Cupeño.⁴ The Luiseño people were dispersed over six of these reservations: La Jolla, Rincon, Pauma, Pechanga, Pala, and Soboba.

Original Luiseño culture has persevered, even though the total population has diminished from an estimated ten thousand before contact to less than four thousand.⁵ Although many Luiseño are practicing Roman Catholics, many have retained some form of their precontact religious practices.⁶ The last clothes burning ceremony—a tradition that accompanies the death of a band member—took place on the Rincon Reservation eleven years ago, but certain other codes and regulations exist beneath the surface of the seemingly Catholic wake.⁷ Plant knowledge, in some form, has been passed on to many people. A number of Luiseño still know how to make *wiiwish*, a traditional acorn mush, and have learned the customs that dictate when to go to the mountains and where to gather the acorns.⁸ The traditional hand game of *peon* and secularized dances and songs continue on most Luiseño reservations.

The Luiseño language is spoken fluently by only a few dozen people, yet there is a revival of interest. Language classes have been organized on some of the reservations. A language text was written in 1971 by a Luiseño elder who currently lives on the Rincon Reservation.⁹ Studies of the Luiseño language have been done by William Bright, A.L. Kroeber, and Susan Steele.¹⁰ Kroeber discusses the Luiseño origin tradition as one that "is more thoroughly worked out than by perhaps any other American tribe except possibly some of the Pueblos." Noting that California Indian civilization is often looked upon as an essentially "rudimentary" one, he writes,

But we need only to approach this civilization in a spirit free from haste, and it becomes apparent as endlessly diversified instead of monotonously homogeneous, flowering in the most unexpected places, and with all its childlikeness not devoid here and there of elements of subtlety and nobility. Few California tribes may have reached the attainments of the Luiseño¹¹

Rincon Reservation is located in northeastern San Diego County and comprises eight square miles of green valley and foothills dotted with orchards and small farms. Rincon has spectacular mountain views, particularly of Mount Palomar. The on-reservation population is 1,600, with 651 being enrolled band members and another 200 related to enrolled members. The reservation has a five-person elected council, which serves two-year rotating terms. The council is responsible for developing policy and writing laws, managing tribal resources, and fostering tribal self-determination.

In his assessment of California reservations, *The Earth Is Our Mother*, Dolan Eargle said of Rincon, "Probably the best term for this reservation is 'bustling.'"¹² The Rincon Reservation has a health services facility that serves all Native Americans, a volunteer fire department, a library, an Indian education center, and a thriving Rincon Farms, which boasts more than two hundred acres of crops, including Asian pears, avocados, row crops, and ruby grapefruit. Rincon prides itself on the fact that last year the reservation was successful in securing \$1.6 million in grants to support programs such as library special preservation projects, literacy training, irrigation systems, wetlands protection, well head protection, housing rehabilitation, tobacco avoidance, energy conservation, rural arts, and the like.

A large, modern tribal hall was built in 1978. In 1988, when the current tribal administrator assumed his position, the tribal hall staff was 1.5 persons. Today, the hall has more than forty employees, with a projected growth of about ten staff people for the coming year. Some of this growth will take place because Rincon has just begun a Head Start program—only the third reservation in the state to receive such an award.¹³

Within the tribal hall is a small library that houses the Luiseño Culture Bank, a collection of articles, books, slides, photographs, and tape recordings related to Luiseño culture. In the early 1970s, a group of people from the Luiseño reservations began meeting in the old Rincon Indian Education Center to discuss ways in which

they could "take back" some of their traditional arts. A tribal museum and its related costs were out of the question, but a decision was made to visit a number of libraries, museums, government agencies, and private collections in order to photograph, photocopy, and tape anything they could find relating to their culture.

The Luiseño secured the help of an anthropologist to act as a technical advisor and assist them in preparing a budget in order to apply for a grant under the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts.¹⁴ They received a small grant and matched it with dollar-equal contributions of time, facilities, and skills. This information-gathering process resulted in the acquisition of Luiseño archaeological reports, song notations, and linguistic materials, along with seventy ethnographies, 650 slides of traditional art objects, and 350 old photographs of Luiseño people. The bank also contains tape recordings of ninety-five Luiseño songs and a collection of color photographs of plants used by the Luiseño. Among the libraries and museums visited were the Lowie Museum at the University of California, Berkeley, the Riverside Municipal Museum, the old Mission San Luis Rey, the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, the Museum of Man in San Diego, and the private collections of the Leo Calac family. Once all the copies had been made and the materials gathered together, the Luiseño volunteers sorted and arranged the items, wrote guide cards describing them, and put everything on display in the tribal hall at the Rincon Reservation. A number of sturdy metal cases were acquired so that the exhibit could be packed and transported easily to the other five Luiseño reservations in San Diego County.

In the case of the Luiseño Culture Bank, the process is almost as significant as the product. Dr. Susan Dyal, project anthropologist, published a follow-up article on the culture bank, applauding the determination of the Luiseño people and their willingness to "put aside differences for the sake of their traditional culture and join forces to maximize their strength." She states that "the potentials for expansion and spin-off from the Culture Bank are considerable, and it may be that in time some of the Luiseños' more adventurous hopes will be realized out of this modest beginning."¹⁵ Those "more adventurous hopes" are currently being examined by a team of librarians at California State University, San Marcos.

The Luiseño Culture Bank continues to reside at the Rincon tribal hall library in locked museum cases and, with the exception

of a brief trip in 1990 to the Smithsonian, goes virtually unused. No bibliography of its holdings exists, and subject access is virtually nonexistent. This inaccessibility drew the attention of research librarians who, on a visit to the reservation library, began asking questions about creating a printed bibliography. Once trust and confidence were established between tribal administrators, elders, and university technical advisors, the tribal library manager referred project librarians to an elder who, twenty years prior, had been involved in the initial gathering process and who could provide details on the bank's history. This dialogue led the project librarian to learn more about the creators of the bank, the earlier work done on it, and the tremendous pride the band members have in it.

During one visit by the librarians, tribal elders expressed disappointment with the limited local use made of the stationary and portable culture banks; they were anxious to see more Luiseño people use the material. They also expressed concern that the bank is somewhat "stagnant"; that is, adding new materials to the list is difficult because there is no real classification system and no set of procedures to accommodate new acquisitions. Nothing has been added to the culture bank since its creation in the 1970s. Something one of the elders said to the project librarian that day changed the entire course of the university's involvement. She simply asked if there might be some way to create "electronic access" to the bank.¹⁶ The answer was an immediate "yes." The task then was to identify the software program that would best suit the needs of this unique collection. After several meetings with tribal elders and the tribal council, the university was given the go-ahead to explore ways in which this might be done.

It became clear that the project would require the expertise of a professional catalog librarian to assist with subject heading assignments and other technical aspects. The university's catalog librarian joined the project and was asked to analyze, recommend, and conduct the technical aspects of the conversion from handwritten guide cards to an electronic resource.

The university librarians made a trip to the reservation library so that the cataloger could make an inventory of the holdings. The catalog librarian consulted with archivists and special collections curators regarding the preparation of preliminary inventories for archival collections. Building on this information, the catalog librarian developed an inventory form to meet the needs of the project. This inventory gave librarians an idea of what was there

so that plans for conversion could be made. It would serve to describe and control all the materials until a more detailed analysis could be done. Missing items were cited, and materials without annotation or identification were also noted.

After this first visit, the cataloger decided to explore the capacity of archival cataloging more fully and to compare its strengths with the strengths of conventional cataloging. Resources that were particularly enlightening on the subject were Steven L. Hensen's *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*¹⁷ and a special issue of *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*.¹⁸ Although no manual was found that detailed how to arrange a collection of both originals and copies, several articles on archival and museum organization were available.¹⁹ Many articles about museums and collections founded at the beginning of this century demonstrate how active Euro-Americans have been in gathering, organizing, and displaying American Indian artifacts. There are numerous anthropological essays, dating from the early part of this century to the present day, that describe the organization, tools, and beliefs of American Indians.²⁰ More recent materials indicate a shift from Euro-American to American Indian initiative in the preservation and revitalization of American Indian heritage.²¹ John A. Fleckner's *Native American Archives*,²² published in 1984, remarks that, currently, tribal members often will authorize and oversee the collection of materials pertinent to their heritage. Interest in American Indian artifacts has grown and has been accompanied by attention to issues of ownership, looting, and accountability.²³

After a great deal of research, the project's catalog librarian decided that a blend of archival and traditional library cataloging was best suited for the Luiseño Culture Bank. Both Hensen and Fox subscribe to provenance.²⁴ The rule of provenance insists that the original order of a manuscript collection has intrinsic meaning and must, except under unusual circumstances, be maintained or recovered, if at all possible. This principle guided all cataloging decisions about the culture bank project. The Luiseño people had conceived of and organized the Luiseño Culture Bank. Therefore, according to archival principles, it would be maintained in the order in which it had been established. Project librarians would then need to provide additional subject access.

Initially, the culture bank holdings were mounted onto Pro-Cite software, which, at the time, seemed to meet all technical needs. A university Affirmative Action minigrant was awarded

to project librarians, and a student was hired to begin inputting records. Solely a text program designed to create bibliographies, Pro-Cite turned out to be the wrong software for this project. It did not accommodate cataloging procedure easily, nor could it lock to prevent inadvertent additions or deletions. Project librarians met with San Diego State University's director of media and technology services and were convinced that HyperCard would best suit the needs of the culture bank. New information can be added to existing records easily, the technique of scrolling and clicking on "buttons" has general user appeal, and the program can be locked so that a user does not delete or add information by mistake. Most importantly, HyperCard's capacity to hold sound and images—complete with a zoom feature—allows for the incorporation of major components of the bank such as photographs, slides, and reel-to-reel tapes.

Project librarians visited the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, which contains one of the best archival collections of California Indian materials in the United States. Colleagues at the Southwest agreed that the decision to go with HyperCard was a good one. They also recommended the use of *The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)*. This confirmed other previous readings in the library literature.²⁵ Employing *LCSH* provides consistent subject terms in the database. *LCSH* will provide continuity in subject access added at a later date. To ensure access for users who may not be familiar with *LCSH* terminology, cross-references were to be added liberally.

A second minigrant was awarded, and another student was hired to begin keying the original descriptive information into records and to add the subject headings assigned by the project's technical librarian. Work on the culture bank continues at a modest pace. Some images have been scanned onto the database, with corresponding text. Missing pieces are being located, and further technical advice is being sought from university computer science faculty in order to determine what state-of-the-art hardware might be used for the final project and to identify custom programming possibilities.

Project librarians hope to work with the people at the Rincon Reservation in writing a separate grant for funding to digitize images and songs onto the software. A subsequent grant might fund the purchase of state-of-the-art hardware for the tribal hall library, for the exclusive purpose of hosting the culture bank database. Much work remains to be done in adding records for

materials not already described. Plant and flower slides need to be identified and annotated as to name, place, and use in Luiseño culture. Songs and ceremonies on reel-to-reel tapes should be indexed and commentary added. The elders have spoken of adding more artifacts and information to the culture bank. They are conscious that people with knowledge and memories of earlier Luiseño culture are aging and that their recollections must be recorded as soon as possible. Grant money should be secured so that Luiseño people can be trained to use, update, and maintain the bank independently of the university and its advisors.

It is important to note here that other opportunities for linkage with Rincon Reservation have emerged as a result of the librarians' involvement with Rincon. The College of Education at California State University, San Marcos is currently working on establishing a tutorial project that connects student teachers with reservation youth. A "Serve America" planning grant has been funded at Rincon that will implement a community service program, involving university students with the reservation and with the school systems that serve local Indian children. The dean of the College of Education will sit on the policy council for the new Head Start program. In October 1992, the president of the university invited the tribal administrator and members of the Rincon Tribal Council to California State University, San Marcos for a tour of the phase one building complex that just opened on the university's new 304-acre site.

Recently established as the twentieth campus of the California State University system, CSU San Marcos is the first public university to be built in the nation in twenty-five years. The university's founding faculty created a unique and visionary mission statement that, in part, focuses on multiculturalism and seeks to provide students with "global awareness." Although it is somewhat unorthodox for academic librarians to engage in outreach activities, the director of library services, the president, and the vice president for academic affairs wholeheartedly support outreach to underserved populations. The possibilities for making a difference and for expanding our own worldview seem infinite for an infant university that does not yet have a host of reasons for not becoming involved in the community.

The Luiseño people clearly grasp the importance of preserving traditional arts in order to reinforce tribal identity and cultural values. They showed tremendous initiative when they undertook the task of reclaiming their material culture from institutions

across the state of California. Although resources were limited, there was no shortage of dedication and perseverance on the part of project volunteers. This is a cultural preservation project that other tribes might replicate. Today, elders and young band members alike are engaged in various activities that will ensure the preservation of centuries-old practices. Some elders are teaching others traditional basket-making, using bundles of *Epicampes* grass stems and *Juncus* rush. One elder on the Rincon Reservation is making pottery, using traditional techniques that include shaping coiled strips of clay with a paddle. A young Luiseño man, with the support of reservation elders, is teaching young adults and children to perform a ceremonial dance called the *chalawpish*.²⁶

California State University, San Marcos librarians hope to play a part in reinforcing the fierce determination and cultural pride that characterize the Luiseño people. The HyperCard version of the Luiseño Culture Bank holds the promise of a preserved culture, improved access to and understanding of that culture, and a continuing partnership between a newborn university and a centuries-old reservation.

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NOTES

1. *Mission Indians* is sometimes considered a pejorative term, because of the devastating effect mission life had on native peoples. However, on the reservation featured in this article, the people consistently refer to themselves as the San Luiseño Band of Mission Indians.

2. Sherburne F. Cook, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769–1970* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 1–43.

3. Richard L. Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land: American Indians in San Diego, 1850–1880* (Sacramento, CA: Sierra Oaks Pub., 1987), 13–17.

4. The Luiseño definition includes a number of socially, culturally, and linguistically related bands whose traditional land areas generally conform to

present-day reservation holdings. These bands, when placed in the reservation context by the federal government, began to be referred to as separate and distinct tribal entities with inherent powers of sovereignty and self-government. Today, six Luiseño bands function as separate and distinct tribal entities, each with its own reservation area and separate trust relationship with the federal government.

5. Lowell John Bean and Florence C. Shipek, "Luiseño," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Robert F. Heizer, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 557.

6. Ibid.

7. Mark Macarro, interview with author Biggs, Rincon Reservation, 14 October 1992.

8. Ibid.

9. Villiana Hyde, *An Introduction to the Luiseño Language* (Morongo Indian Reservation, Banning, CA: Malki Museum Press, 1971).

10. William Bright, comp., *A Luiseño Dictionary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968); A.L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976); Susan Steele, *Agreement and Anti-Agreement: A Syntax of Luiseño* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990).

11. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*, 677.

12. Dolan H. Eargle, *The Earth Is Our Mother: A Guide to the Indians of California, Their Locales and Historic Sites*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Trees Company Press, 1989), 78–79.

13. Jim Fletcher, interview with author Biggs, Rincon Reservation, 18 September 1992.

14. Susan Dyal, "The Luiseño Culture Bank Project," in *Sharing a Heritage*, ed. Charlotte Heth and Michael Swarm (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 1984), 123–26.

15. Ibid., 126.

16. Patricia Duro, interview with author Biggs, Rincon Reservation, 4 October 1991.

17. Steven L. Hensen, ed., *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989).

18. *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 11:3/4 (1990).

19. Karen R. Lewis, *A Manual for the Visual Collections in the Harvard University Archives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library, 1981); Nancy E. Peace, ed., *Archival Choices* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1984); Sylva N. Manoogian, "Building Ethnic Library Collections," *Ethnic Forum* 2:2 (1982): 52–59; Charles Wetherell, et al., "Managing Cultural Resource Information: The California Experience," *The Public Historian* 9:1 (Winter 1987): 31–45; Simon J. Bronner, "Visible Proofs: Material Culture Study in American Folkloristics," *American Quarterly* 35:3 (1983): 316–38; David J. Russo, "The 'Things' of History," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 15:4 (Winter 1984): 397–406.

20. Dennis H. O'Neill, "A Shaman's 'Sucking Tube' from San Diego County, California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 5:1/2 (1983): 245–47.

21. Frankie Pelzman, "Native American Libraries: Ten Years Later," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 63:8 (1989): 58–61; Rick Hill and Jim Wake, "The Native American Center for the Living Arts," *American Indian Art Magazine* 5:3 (1980): 23–25; Lotsee Patterson, ed., "Native American Library Services: Reclaiming the Past, Designing the Future," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 67:4 (1992): 28–42.

22. John A. Fleckner, *Native American Archives* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1984), 4–5, 46.
23. Robert K. Landers, "Is America Allowing Its Past to Be Stolen?" *Editorial Research Reports* 3 (1991): 34–46.
24. Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts*; Michael J. Fox, "Descriptive Cataloging for Archival Materials," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 11:3 and 4 (1990): 17–34.
25. Richard P. Smiraglia, "Subject Access to Archival Materials Using LCSH," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 11:3/4 (1990): 63–89.
26. Macarro, interview with author Biggs, Rincon Reservation, 14 October 1992.