

OBJECT BIOGRAPHIES:

A Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation Buckskin and Quillwork Outfit, a Nez Perce Woman's  
Buckskin Dress, a Ramos Polychrome Jar, and a Navajo Man's Military Style-Jacket

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Object Biographies: A Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation Buckskin and Quillwork Outfit, a Nez Perce Woman's Buckskin Dress, a Ramos Polychrome Jar, and a Navajo Man's Military Style-Jacket

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The objects and collections held in museums have larger histories, contexts, and meanings outside of their stewardship within these institutions. They have life histories, which can be traced and documented by creating biographies spanning from their creation and use to museum acquisition and life within the museum. As a type of restorative justice, the life history approach illustrates an example of decolonizing museum practice and the changing responsibilities of best practice standards. Creating a full life history for museum artifacts is much more than recuperating facts and events or filling archives with object documentation. Creating an object biography is about responsible stewardship and curation, engaging communities and creating new contacts, and ultimately connecting objects, stories, and people. The following biographies of four ethnographic objects in Anthropology Section of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History illustrate changing practices of museum collections acquisition and care and emphasize the utility of the life history approach in contributing to current best practices of museum stewardship.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Like people, objects are created, they accumulate experiences, and they have lives and histories. If objects are durable through time, then the changing and transforming events, contexts, and perspectives they experience leave both visible and invisible marks in a web of relationships which can be read and interpreted using careful tracking, detective work, and creativity. In this way, biography is an apt metaphor for understanding the ways that human and object life histories inform and interact with one another through time and space (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169). At any given moment in the life of an object, there are a myriad of accumulated past contexts and possible meanings brought to bear on the object by those who interact with it. As institutions of preservation and storehouses of collections, the trajectories of many objects bring them to museums in various ways throughout the course of their lives. Museums take possession of an object, and transform it through inventory, classification, and recontextualization so that it “becomes part of a new order and acquires new meanings” (Turgeon 1997: 21). The interactions an object has within a museum should then also be considered part of the life history of an object. I would argue that when a museum object is separated from the events and meaning it acquired in its lifetime as a result of the processes of collecting, exchange, and acquisition, this can be viewed as lack of responsible stewardship of the object. Meaning of objects has become prominent in the way we think and understand them and our responsibilities as museum professionals and collections managers have changed the ways that we look for and create meaning for the objects we steward. If museums place importance on classifying, understanding, and fully describing the life of a particular object, then I believe proper stewardship should envision an object in its whole lifetime and strive to create

and recuperate meaning in that way. When museum objects are used as biography's subjects, it can sharpen the understanding of an object, account for multiple perspectives and authorities, and enrich the stories told about the object.

In the following chapters, I played museum detective and then biographer for four objects, and traced the initial and continually shifting meanings of each as they moved through different contexts and exchanges throughout their lives. The biographies end with their current residence in the Anthropology Section of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (UCMNH), where they continue to accumulate layers of meaning. The objects include a man's leather and quillwork outfit from the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, a woman's leather dress with a beaded yoke from the Nez Perce tribe, a man's shirt of trade cloth and beadwork of Southwest tribal affiliation, and a ceramic pot identified as a replica Ramos Polychrome of the Casas Grandes archaeological culture. Like the majority of the objects in the Anthropology Section, and museums overall, these objects have shifted in context and meaning over the course of their lives. Some of their accumulated meanings and information have been lost through their many transfers of possession and the passage of time but all of them have undergone changes in context, meaning, place, and significance. I don't describe individual biographies of these objects to emphasize them as singular or as anomalies, but to point out that any object in the collection can benefit from a critical reading of its life. All of the objects I chose to play biographer for illustrate the complex ways that museums acquire, classify, perceive, and interpret the objects they steward and curate.

For each object, I used in-depth material culture research that focused first and foremost on the object itself and then slowly expanded outward to include sources farther and farther from the physical object in order to fully inform my biography and accurately trace the object's life

trajectory. I accumulated evidence, followed leads, and filled in gaps with creative interpretation, but in each of the histories, there are more questions than answers. In some cases, the museum's written records and associated documents pertaining to the objects varied in quantity and quality. Archival sources regarding a single object could range from a few letters of correspondence between donor and curator to entire documents and reports about former contexts, current interpretation, and previous analysis. Although I could make some cautious generalizations and assumptions about life trajectories of objects or types, because each object has the potential for an individualized history, the possibilities of its use, contexts, and career are difficult to accurately determine. For this reason, in cases where I could not recuperate events or put forth informed generalizations there are gaps in the life histories of the objects, and I left some standard biographical details such as date and origin of manufacture, original or previous owners, and life experiences.

#### University of Colorado Museum of Natural History – Anthropology Collections

The UCMNH, also known as the CU Museum, is an academic unit of the Graduate School at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and is divided into several cognate departments, including an Anthropology Section. As part of its mission, “The University of Colorado Museum fosters exploration and appreciation of the natural environment and human cultures through research, teaching, and community outreach. We provide academic training for graduate students in Museum and Field Studies; build, conserve, and interpret research collections; and offer exhibits and educational programs for the University and the public,” (UCMNH n.d.). The museum was founded in 1902, when Junius Henderson was appointed Curator of the museum and given the responsibility of collating the various and unrelated collections contained at the University into a single collection (UCMNH n.d.). In 1953, Joe Ben Wheat became the first

Curator of Anthropology at the CU Museum, continuing the role until his retirement in 1986 (Cordell 1997: 12; Lange and Leonard 1993: 137). Wheat was concerned with building the collections of ethnography and further developing the archaeological collections. His efforts increased the archaeology and ethnology collections by thousands of objects, as well as increased the amount of archival and photographic material curated by the museum in the thirty years he served as museum faculty (Lange and Leonard 1993: 137). By increasing the volume of these collections in quantity and also quality, “the major strengths of the collections that Joe Ben developed are in Colorado and Southwestern prehistory, Southwestern ethnology (especially textiles), and Plains ethnology” (Lange and Leonard 1993: 137). In fact, the four object biographies represented in the following chapters were all acquired during Joe Ben Wheat’s tenure at the CU Museum, and one of them was donated by Wheat himself.

#### History of Collecting in Western Museums and Subsequent Changes

The breadth of CU Museum’s Anthropology holdings represents a long history of collecting, as well as the ideas, ideals, and theories that informed its collectors and curators within the broader history of American museums. Throughout the lives of objects, people imbue them with meaning and significance which is manipulated and contested through time. In museums, curators, museum professionals, and stakeholders impose classifications and recontextualization on objects, which influence their overall care for and understanding of collections. From the moment an object enters the museum, it is classified in a variety of ways which impose order and meaning. Classification for all objects includes registration, cataloguing, and storage housing. These categories are arbitrary and meaningless for the object outside of its context as artifact, but serve an important role within the museum to order and structure knowledge.

Museum collection, accession, storage, and handling practices are rooted in dominant, colonial, and Western ideologies which have in the past given little thought or importance to other, non-dominant cultural perspectives. This has been true for national institutions and natural history museums, which developed in the midst of colonialism and imperialism in North America (Smith 2005: 424). It is especially true for Anthropology collections, which historically have been accumulated under a few key paradigms that have since been deemed discriminatory and colonial. Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when North America was newly colonized, collections consisted of exotic “curiosities” which emphasized the distance between European and non-European civilizations, and facilitated the hierarchical organization and categorization of non-Western peoples (Thomas 1991: 138). In the many decades following America’s independence from Britain, the United States engaged in nation-building and worked to spread Western civilization, wherein settlers charted and controlled indigenous peoples and their regions. As Americans enacted their supposed right and duty to expand across the nation, they welcomed the opportunity to collect directly from new colonial territories, operating under the belief that knowledge was embodied in objects, and could be obtained through systematic collecting and inquiry (Jacknis 2002: 39; O’Hanlon 2000: 5). Systematic collecting operated under the assumption that indigenous cultures were in the process of vanishing due to cultural and physical extinction and would eventually evolve along a linear continuum toward a more civilized state of being. This belief fostered a sense of urgency for collecting in order to rescue or salvage objects from extinction for future study, and produced fervent, meticulous, scientific, and organized collecting of a full range of precontact indigenous material culture (Jacknis 2002: 20).

Anthropology and natural history museums were heavily involved with this type of collecting, and museums were judged to be the best-equipped places for curating and preserving

indigenous material culture (Jacknis 2002: 40; Kreps 2003: 46). Although at times copious notes were taken in the field in an attempt to gather as much knowledge as possible, invariably more care was given to the breadth and depth of illustrative examples than to preserving the shifting meanings and contexts an object had accumulated. Artifacts were often viewed as self-sufficient specimens, which required little commentary as to the political and economic circumstances in which they had been gathered, and which would be appropriately organized and classified within museums (O'Hanlon 2000: 2-4). As a result, depending on the amount of documentation received, maintained, or requested with exchanges or shifts in context, an object may have gaps in its life that may be difficult or impossible to fill or reconstruct (Peers 1999: 294). Losses of knowledge or contexts associated with an object may then be due to its many shifts and transfers, or also because specific meanings and information were purposefully or incidentally not transferred when the objects were.

Within museums, the curation, stewardship, and display of objects also operated under the colonial paradigms of salvage ethnography, linear evolution, and assimilation (Smith 2005: 424). These colonial paradigms dehumanized indigenous people, their knowledge, and their artifacts, treating them as "specimens" or static representations of facts and embodiments of theories (West 2007: 2-4). Objects were lifted from their original contexts to further the museum's goals of preservation and classification, and as Alice Sadongei notes, "museums by their very nature, isolate objects from human societies in order to preserve them for future generations" (Sadongei 2006: 14). This view that ethnographic museums are filled with disembodied objects collected under salvage ethnography that present cultures as fixed and static is part of a larger critique of historic practices.

The discipline of Anthropology, as well as Western museums, have both recognized that historic collecting endeavors were enacted within a climate of political and economic dominance. They are now challenged to better position themselves as inclusive institutions, to establish “on-going dialogue and partnership with indigenous communities and to define a framework for respectful collaboration in the restoration of that inherent human right—the right to be the custodian of your own culture” (Arinze and Cummins 1996: 7). As a result, standards of best practice have changed in every aspect of the museum and they now stress the importance of inclusion, multiple ways of knowing, and multiple perspectives. Curatorial staff are re-examining their role as custodians and addressing questions of ownership, care, display, interpretation, and indigenous curation (Simpson 1996: 171). Although such standards of best practice govern and guide museum professionals today, the long life of the CU Museum exemplifies the history of Western museums as outlined above, and the legacy of past paradigms and collecting is evident in its Anthropology collections. This includes, for example, objects with scarce or little documentary information due to record loss or incomplete information at the time of acquisition and cataloguing, haphazard collecting and accessioning, or lack of intellectual control over objects and their records. Traditionally, the study of objects in museums by researchers has been for the purpose of identifying or reconstructing their original contexts and provenances, and in particular has focused on the manufacture, meaning, and use within these settings. Often these constructions are now viewed to be limited or curtailed by the effects of past paradigms and standards of best practice which produced rather flat and static results and left out whole periods within the greater lifespan of the objects. In spite of the limited scope of reconstruction and the paucity of original documentation that sheds light on an object’s original

manufacture, use, and meaning contexts, productive research is possible into the entire history of the object—it's life, history, and career.

#### Life History Concept: Biography, History, Patina, Palimpsest

The basic premise of this type of biographical reconstruction is that objects "...live beyond their origins, and acquire new meanings, new uses, and new owners along the way" (Ames 1992: 46). The events, uses, and contexts become accretions and signs of wear, attest to the history the object has witnessed in its career, and provide evidence that the object has experienced time and history before the present moment. Investigating the surface details and carefully reading the object can produce a full history of the object, and with the object as the center of research, these histories become biographies. Therefore, the concept of life history, cultural biography, career, and social patina become useful strategies to carefully trace and consider the shifting meanings of an object.

In the essay "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Igor Kopytoff offers a way to approach and think about the lives of objects, in what he has called a "cultural biography of things" (Kopytoff 1986: 68). This approach recognizes that the values, status, meaning, and significance given to objects are dynamic and have the ability to change with time and perspective. A cultural biography of an object focuses on the chain of events and contexts through which an object accumulates and is endowed with cultural markings, meanings, and classifications (Kopytoff 1986: 68). Many other similar models have been proposed in the vein of Kopytoff's cultural biography as a way to trace the ways meaning and value accumulate on and transform objects as they continually move through time and place (Goden and Marshall 1999: 169-172). The meanings, values, and marks

that objects acquire as they move through webs of relationships have been referred to as its “social patina”, an accretion that builds with time (Ames 1992: 141). Another metaphor for this accumulation is object as palimpsest—something that is reused or altered, but still bears traces of an earlier form—such that the social patina which accrues in layers upon an object never fully obscures or erases the layers before it (Ames 1992: 141). Social patina and palimpsest are useful ways to consider how objects hold meaning, and are helpful constructs for beginning to trace and tease apart the social history of the object to construct a fuller biography. Studying the object as palimpsest with social patinas suggests a richer life history that moves beyond the linear flow of maker, user, collector, and museum to incorporate what Ames called the social history of an object, or “...what happens to objects, and to the people they attract, once they become appropriated by scholars, collectors, and museums in wealthier nations” (Ames 1992: 46). Provenance research is another similar way to trace an object’s life and like object biographies, to establish the names of owners, places and dates of ownership, and methods of transfer (Yeide et. al.: 10).

#### Application and Utility of the Life History Concept

Kopytoff suggests the following questions as a way to produce an object’s life history (Kopytoff 1986: 66-67):

What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its “status” and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized “ages” or periods in the thing’s

“life”, and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?

These questions informed how I examined each of the four objects, and also helped the objects to speak about themselves and their ties to people and contexts. Because objects continually pick up meanings and connections as they move through their lives, they embody a vast amount of information, perspectives, and meanings (Bonetti 2007: 175; Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170). A biography highlights the complexity of encounters, and stresses the importance of considering all of the people, places, and contexts an object moves through (Peers 1999: 291). The life history approach acknowledges multiple ways of knowing an object by examining the vast web of interactions the object has. At a single point in an object’s career, there can be multiple contexts based on the perspectives, interests, and values brought forth by those who interact with it. Therefore any event in the biography of an object can convey subtle meanings based on convictions and values (Kopytoff 1986: 67). Given the myriad of information written onto an object, they cannot be fully understood at single points in their life. Instead, even the most mundane objects can only be understood when their entire life is examined. Biographies of objects highlight and allude to the interrelationships between material culture and social and cultural histories, with the potential to enlighten and provide knowledge that would otherwise be hidden or overlooked (Kopytoff 1986: 67; Martin 1996: 6). In the beginning of an artifact’s life, raw material is taken and transformed according to a design concept to create an object, which then enters into a myriad of possibilities including use, distribution, exchange, damage, loss, recycle, and other types of physical, temporal, cultural, and social movements. These movements, as well as interpretations and recontextualizations involve relationships in which the object is invested with the authority and privilege of those possessing it (Ames 1992: 144).

Additionally, exchanges and transfers across cultures often occur in colonial contexts, such that in their new contexts the objects come to represent a discriminatory viewpoint (Peers 1999: 297). Particularly in instances of colonial encounters, objects might experience a sharp break in their life histories (Gosden and Marshall 1999:174). Some objects within groups or categories become singularized and have very specific, memorable, or unusual life-histories or careers. Of these objects that have been singled out, sometimes the specifics of their histories are remembered and well-known and at other times parts of their histories are lost through recontextualization or exchange.

Museums are historically places of colonial encounters, where objects were separated from many layers of accumulated meaning. In this way museums are machines for recontextualization and document its process and history, and are major venues for blending social history and material culture. An object embodies its production context and subsequent contexts of use and transfer, but also those of the museum in which it is placed (Bonetti 2007: 175). Even after they enter museums, the process of recontextualization involves many levels, and objects can continue to accrue patina and add to their biographies. This is because the present significance of an object is connected to people, interactions, and events, which continually contribute both physical marks and invisible perspectives upon the objects. Although research and recontextualization of objects in museums never can fully arrive at earlier meanings, fragments of past biographies and earlier meanings can be uncovered through the documentation of life histories.

I utilized the life history approach in response to the legacy of collecting practices in the history of museums and applied it to the anthropological collections of the UCMNH in order to test the utility of this type of recuperative collections stewardship. By following their pathways

through life and keeping the ideas of social history, biography, palimpsest, and patina in mind, I hoped to more fully understand the meaning of four objects whose histories contain many gaps and resituate them in their cultural contexts. The life history paradigm illustrates an example of decolonizing museum practice and the changing responsibilities of best practice standards for museums and their objects. As a type of restorative justice, it is useful in the way that it seeks to incorporate multiple knowledges, meanings, and contexts for objects that have previously been decontextualized and only seen from certain perspectives. This inclusivity and the acknowledgement of others' knowledge as both valid and important is part of the contemporary movement in museums to better understand the objects they care for, their stakeholders, and the relationships and interactions between them.

Creating a full life history for museum artifacts is much more than recuperating facts and events or filling archives with object documentation. Creating an object biography is about responsible stewardship and curation, engaging communities and creating new contacts, and ultimately connecting objects, stories, and people.

## CHAPTER 2

### Methodology

In order to reconstruct the biographies of the four objects, I acted as a museum detective using creativity and attention to detail, and conducted in-depth research on each object. Although current museum practice necessitates certain crucial paperwork and information, such as knowledge of provenience transactions, deed of gift, donor history, and cultural attribution, past collecting practices operated under different paradigms and standards. Some objects do not carry the paperwork of their transfers, history, or past meanings, and “even if documentation was obtained, the margin for error was great...information on a specimen was not always passed on as the object changed hands, and often had been lost by the time the object reached a museum” (Hall 1980: 29). Although objects which lack biographical information or documentation are common in museums with long institutional histories, I will demonstrate ways to recuperate meaning and information about them. In the biographies I created, I hoped to sort out the many contexts of the objects in the span of their lifetime, placing them in matrices of space and time and within multiple cultural frames and perspectives. I also examined the web of interactions and relationships they have been a part of during their museum residency. Objects don’t just sit in museum storage spaces, their lives are predicated on preventative care measures which help maintain them and they experience interpretation, care, display, research, and other activities within the museum. Tracing life histories and obtaining provenance information utilized a variety of media and sources from both within and outside the CU Museum, including archives, photographic archives, ephemera files, publications, interviews, electronic files, experts, and the internet (Yeide et. al. 2001: 9).

### Institutional Files

The first step in assembling the information to create a biography was to consult information directly about the object itself, as well as the hard-copy and electronic files within the archives of the museum. I went through the related curatorial files, carefully reading the supporting documents, tracking each source, and recording and digitally storing any relevant information. Extensive collection information is desirable—where the object was obtained, when, by whom, and from whom—and a survey of these records provided a foundation of information for future reference, including lines of evidence, gaps in formation or history, and leads for further investigation. Basic records for the objects were found in museum's archival files, and include such standard documentation as accession ledgers, catalogue cards, donor and registration files, and correspondence with involved parties. Important accompanying information was also gathered from these sources, including notes about the primary contexts, use, initial transfers, acquisition by a collector, and associations with people, places, events, or dates (Hedlund 1990: 10). This information was provided with the object by the original collector or donor, as well as in annotations on the associated documentation, and used to help build the history of the object before it entered into the museum. I also looked for any recontextualizations or uses to which it had been put to once it became a museum artifact, including preventative care and collections management, scholarly research, loans, exhibitions, publications, and conservation.

### Reading the Object

Museum records cannot be fully relied upon to provide complete or accurate descriptions of an object, so in conjunction with the museum records and associated documentation, I

examined the objects themselves. As a primary document, the object and its physical marks document its history and experiences. Using previous descriptions, condition reports, and photographs from the museum records, I carefully examined and described each object beginning with its materials and dimensions, followed by a description of patterning and designs, and finally noted any distinctive marks (Yeide et. al. 2001: 11). Materials used in the manufacture and the decorative patterns on an object can provide clues and leads for investigating provenance, and as lines of evidence for either corroborating or determining attributions of time, place, and ownership. Signs of use wear in the form of dirt accumulation, damage, and repairs can suggest experiences in the object's life history, both in its original and subsequent contexts. In addition to providing evidence of an object's career, these marks can also provide clues about determining the specific context of the object when the sign of wear occurred. For example, certain types of marks, wearing, repairs, and damage, such as tags, stickers, glue, fading, and pest damage, are more consistent with collectors and museum contexts than original use contexts. Marks that are not consistent with original use context and are not part of the object's history in its current residence often have the potential to provide information about previous collections or ownership history.

As soon as an object is formally acquired by a museum, it is physically marked with a catalogue number. Physical numbers other than this catalogue number can also be used as clues to previous owners and numbering systems. In addition to the physical catalogue number, it is common to affix a tag to the object. At the very least, this tag records the object's catalogue number, and can also include donor information, previous owners and numbering systems, and a description of the object. Sometimes these tags are not affixed directly to the object, and instead are pieces of paper associated with the object. It is important to note physical numbers, affixed

tags, and associated notes, because the information recorded in these places may not be recorded anywhere else. This information should be added to the object's catalogue files to safeguard against a loss of information in case the affixed or associated tag becomes separated from the object.

Especially in museums with long histories of existence, which operated within different collecting and stewardship paradigms throughout their lives, and which are known to have documentation and data discrepancies, when tracking an object's documentation it may be important to take into account the overall trustworthiness of the data and sources, and to seek out the first documents associated with the object when it was accessioned into the museum. Often, the earlier the documentation about an object is, the more likely the data it contains is accurate, detailed, and free of transcription errors. However, this may not be the case for research, analyses, conservation, and preservation, which may add new data to or correct old data about an object. Early data and documentation may have come into the object when it was accessioned, or it may be the data contained in the ledger book on the tag affixed to the object. Museums, like the CU Museum, which operated under a variety of best practice standards, have had many collections assistants and volunteers, and are known to split rather than collate records, should be cautious of data and cataloguing problems. As museums like these document an object in the ledger, on catalogue cards, in object and donor files, and in its database, there is the chance for error and loss or change of information due to the transcription process. Because catalogue cards were created after the object was tagged and recorded in the ledger, the data they contain may have errors and losses. This is also true for database entries, which were created by pulling recorded information from tags, notes, the ledger, catalogue cards, and other associated documentation. These types of errors and information losses in the process of documenting an

object are less likely if the museum has developed and put into place standard protocols for accessioning, cataloguing, numbering, and databasing the object.

### Outside Research: People and Comparative Examples

Based on the institutional files and a physical examination of the object, it is important to determine if the physical attributes of the object—materials, shape, manufacture, condition, decoration—are consistent with the archival information and the object’s history. When I had assembled basic information about each object from the museum’s accession and documentation files, and examined and described the object, I began to seek out other sources of information to fill in gaps in my understanding of the object, its biographical and historical contexts, and its many transfers and contextual shifts. I conducted research in the Anthropology Section Library of the CU Museum, hoping to locate publications the objects were referenced in and collate sources which would help me to gain a better understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of the objects I was studying. Because “when attempting to identify a decorative style one must look at many examples from the region and period in question” (Hall 1980: 32), I looked for comparative examples, styles, or designs to serve as a reference. I also consulted with the curators and collection manager regarding their knowledge of the objects themselves, their cultural contexts and suggestions for leads to pursue including publications and experts.

Continuing to gather leads, I began to expand my research to sources outside of the museum, including written material, libraries, museum collections, scholars and experts, Native American tribal members, former owners or those related to the objects, and even visual-comparative searches via the internet. Careful word searches and creative combinations often led to similar pieces at the websites of both auction houses and digitized museum collections. Although an online catalogue of museum artifacts may be more reliable and have better information than an

online catalogue for an auction house, they both gave me rich visual comparisons and suggested new leads for searching.

Records that exist tracing an object's history may require careful reading and analysis; such that "biographical research often requires that one read between the lines of extant documents" (Peers 1999: 293). Additionally, some objects are important or significant because of their associations with important historical events, specific and detailed documentation, or illustrious figures and collections. Although each object had its own stories to tell, more were forthcoming than others with information about their past, their histories, and their contexts. Each had idiosyncrasies in its biography that both helped and hindered my research. Sometimes careful research, well-founded hunches, or promising leads produced information that was of little use, and I was left with significant gaps in a biography; while at other times I was fortunate and the resources and answers found me, providing information that would otherwise have remained hidden and inaccessible.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Man's Buckskin and Quillwork Outfit – UCM 9936a-c

#### Introduction

This chapter is a cultural biography of an heirloom—a meaningful family piece. It follows the life history of a men's leather and floral quillwork outfit, consisting of a jacket, pants, and gloves, from their use context by the Ripley family of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, and traces the trajectories of subsequent new contexts and exchanges as the outfit travelled away from the family. I approached this outfit as originally serving as an heirloom, something that is carefully and purposefully preserved and transferred within a specific sphere of exchange, commonly "...the clothing and personal ornaments that are produced for, or displayed and exchanged at, important feasts or rituals..." (Lillios1999: 237). Although the exact origins are unknown, to the Ripley family it initially represented a cherished belonging, and later came to embody the changing conditions and challenges of life on the reservation and the sacrifices necessary to maintain home and family. It became a liquid asset that could be commoditized for monetary gain, and entered into the sphere of exchange, where it subsequently became a museum artifact and was seen as a beautiful example of fine quillwork that would fit into the scope of collecting and make a fine addition to the collection. The specific context of its sale by the Ripley family and acquisition by the CU Museum represents a period of collecting where economic need correlated with selling family possessions and "in the low points of some family's experiences with political and economic restructuring of their societies,...items they were unable to hold onto were recontextualized" and left Native hands (Erikson 2002: 49). Recently, the Ripley family has renewed contact with the

outfit, adding to the way that the object is perceived and understood within the museum, and rekindling the meaning of heirloom.

The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes are together federally recognized as Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, and colloquially refer to themselves as the MHA Nation. Located on the Upper Missouri River, the Fort Berthold Reservation itself has a relatively short history compared with the time-depth of occupation in the region by the MHA Nation. Before the arrival of Euro-Americans, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara had distinct histories and were connected to one another through intertribal interaction. The arrival of Euro-Americans began to funnel their histories into a single one as incoming colonizers moved westward to settle, displacing other indigenous peoples as they went. Encroaching Euro-American settlements, hostilities from neighboring tribes, and incoming disease created conditions that made it favorable for the Mandan and Hidatsa to take up residence together, later joined by the Arikara. For these reasons and as well as the assimilationist desires of the federal government, the three began to create history and place together, and eventually were allotted lands by the federal government as a single united nation for the Fort Berthold Reservation. Colonialist assimilation paradigms continued to further impact the histories of the three tribes when the government took away lands which treaties and acts had designated for the reservation, and forcibly jostled peoples of the MHA Nation around their native landscape into increasingly smaller parcels of land. The quillwork outfit from the Fort Berthold reservation is part of this history of movement, assimilation, and social and cultural changes. It traveled and experienced the history and change along with the residents of the reservation, and I trace the events and contexts that impacted the perception and meaning of the piece.

The Ripley quillwork outfit is a good candidate for research under the life history approach for a number of reasons, including its physical condition, clear attribution and source, and specific acquisition documentation. There are some very specific parts of its life history that are clear and readily documented, as well as some significant gaps that would be well-served through investigation and contextual research. It has had a lengthy residency within the CU Museum, and has accrued some social patina subsequent to its arrival. The most significant change to its meaning is the renewed connection made by its original family members, who continued to view it as an heirloom although not in their direct possession.

This set of objects has a clear history of acquisition and accession into the Anthropology Section of the CU Museum, detailed in a series of correspondences between then-Curator Joe Ben Wheat, and Reverend Harold Case who facilitated the transfer and sale of the suit from the Ripley family. The clearest part of this object's biography is this series of letters, which reveal the motivations of all of the parties involved—Curator Joe Ben Wheat, Reverend Case, and the Ripley family, as well as the different meanings and significances these people placed on the suit. The museum's documentation also provided a wealth of information regarding the history and key players of the Fort Berthold reservation. In the several decades that it lived in the museum once it had been purchased by Joe Ben Wheat in 1957, the outfit led a quiet life. It was in the last several years however, that the Ripley family contacted the museum and reconnected the outfit to the Fort Berthold community. Although the documentation stated the name of the family and their reasons for parting with the piece, there was no detail provided about its life on the reservation in the possession of the Ripley family. A visit in November of 2012 from Mrs. Isabelle Medchill, the granddaughter of David Jackson Ripley who owned the outfit, added meanings and contexts to the museum's understanding of the outfit that had been forgotten and

lost since it had left her family. Medchill's interactions with and perceptions of the suit created a new set of possibilities for more fully reconstructing its life history before the museum and within the museum. She provided important facts and anecdotes that contributed to knowledge about the suit, and also provided leads for more investigative research into its biography. I began to see how the suit fit in meaningfully with specific events on the Fort Berthold reservation, and more clearly understand the specific motivations for its sale. Equipped with the base knowledge gleaned from the museum records and the additional knowledge provided by Mrs. Medchill, I began seek out sources to fill in the remaining gaps and piece together a more continuous history.

### Object Properties

In order to have a better understanding of this outfit's life history, it is first important to examine the suit itself, noting materials, designs, and construction. These small details can provide insights into tribal attribution, date, and possible uses, especially when compared to other similar materials and styles. The entire outfit, University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (UCM) number 9936a-c consists of a hide coat (Figure 1. **Coat** and Figure 2. **Coat**) leggings (Figure 3. **Leggings**), and pair of gloves (Figure 4. **Gloves** and Figure 5. **Gloves**)—each with decoration including leather fringing and quillwork in a floral design in a spectrum of colors. The outfit also combines both European and indigenous elements in its style, design, and material. The details of the manufacture and original acquisition of the quillwork pants, jacket, and gloves are not readily available given the associated documentation of the object within the museum, and with this information lacking certain contexts and meanings have been divorced from the outfit. In the original letters preceding its purchase by the museum, the suit is referred

to as both a hunting suit and a dancing shirt (Case 1957b), but my investigation could not say with certainty if these descriptions represent the full range of uses the suit was put to.



**Figure 1. Coat**

MHA Nation, no date given. Ripley jacket, obverse, opened to show interior pink lining. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9936a.



**Figure 2. Coat**

MHA Nation, no date given. Ripley jacket, reverse, shows areas of color fading in the quill design. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9936b.



**Figure 3. Leggings**

MHA Nation, no date given. Ripley leggings, oriented in position of being worn. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9936b.



**Figure 4. Gloves**

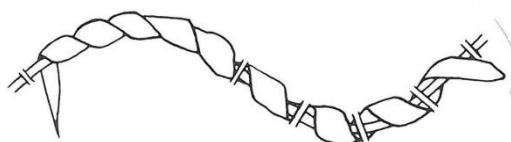
MHA Nation, no date given. Ripley gloves, tops shown. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9936c.



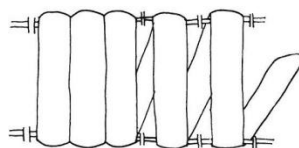
### Figure 5. Gloves

MHA Nation, no date given. Ripley gloves, palms shown. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9936c.

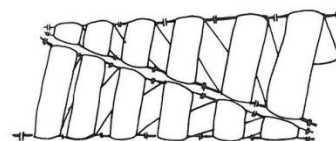
Object UCM 9936a is a men's buckskin coat tailored in the style of a European coat, with a high collar, symmetrical breast pockets, and buttonhole closures. The jacket is lined with pink flannel fabric on the inside, and buckskin cords are used in place of buttons as closures. Short leather fringe adorns the seams at the collar, shoulders, sleeves, as well as three vertical rows down the back and around the bottom edge of the coat. The two breast pockets, as well as the chest, shoulders, and upper back are decorated with porcupine quill decoration, utilizing one-thread, one-quill sewing (Figure 6) and two-thread, one-quill sewing (Figure 7) (Hall 1980: 49).



**Figure 6. One-thread, one-quill sewing** (Hall 1980: 49).



**Figure 7. Two-thread, one-quill sewing** (Hall 1980: 49).



The quillwork is in a floral design made of brightly dyed quills in purple, pink, orange, blue, aqua, and yellow. The floral design is made up of groupings of stacked, double-curved bilateral symmetry in simple flower, petal, and leaf shapes, as well as abstract curvilinear shapes. The double-curve design motif consists of “two equal, opposed curving lines emanating from a common point” (Conn 1986: 164) and is often used in conjunction with bilateral symmetry. The breast pockets show this stacked, bilateral floral design, as well as additional quillwork highlights near the opening of the pocket, including a narrow pink quilled line, a narrow aqua quilled line, a zigzag aqua quillwork stitched line, and a short fringe decorated with alternating sections of wrapped quill in blue and aqua. The design on the upper back of the jacket follows that of the front chest, and also features a curved line in pink quill which includes several spiral

scrolls and an upside-down heart in blue quill. There is slight fading in the quillwork on both the front and back of the jacket.

Object UCM 9936b is a pair of men's buckskin leggings, which accompany jacket UCM 9936a. The leggings have quill decoration in similar design, style, and color to the jacket, as well as a fringe on the outside of each leg. The floral design runs vertically on the front of each legging, near the fringed side, utilizes the same color scheme as the jacket, and again features stacked, double-curved bilateral symmetry. Evidence of outlining in blue can be seen adjacent to the quilled pattern, suggesting that the design was carefully planned before the quills were applied and that the artist followed a template.

The last piece of the Ripley outfit is a pair of buckskin gloves or gauntlets, number UCM 9936c, lined with pink flannel, with leather fringe out the wrist and outer-edge seams, and floral quillwork matching the rest of the suit in composition and color. Quillwork is on both the top and bottom parts of the cuff, as well as on top of each hand section. The bottom side of the cuffs has a striped, four-lobed pinwheel-like design in the center, surrounded by other floral designs. The pinwheel-like design uses purple and pink quill on the right-hand glove, and purple, pink, and aqua on the left-hand glove. The gloves also have evidence of a pre-determined, drawn-on template that was used to apply the quillwork designs. Compared to the jacket and the leggings, the gloves show the most wear. The palms of the gloves are soiled, and the palm of the left-hand glove has several rubbed areas and small holes, as well as some missing fringe and an area of quill loss. The upper parts of the cuffs on both gloves have areas of faded quillwork. These minor areas of loss and soiling are consistent with use wear and are corroborated by Mrs. Isabelle Medchill, who recalled that her father Jackson Ripley would wear them, especially for working in cold weather (Medchill 2012).

## Manufacture and Materials

The Ripley suit features of floral designs and quillwork, which have long histories of use on the Plains among many groups. Floral designs emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century from a hybrid of European motifs and indigenous Northeast patterns and spread slowly westward through diffusion due to the westward movement of indigenous peoples and European settlers. In the late 18th century and well into the 19<sup>th</sup>, Great Lakes, Dakota groups, and the Cheyenne were pushed westward onto the eastern Plains by spreading European settlers and intertribal alliances with foreign governments (Hall 1980: 27), bringing new motifs and ideas such as floral designs with them (Conn 1986: 22). The Dakota tribes included the Teton or Lakota to the far west, the Yankton and Yanktonnai or Western Dakota, and Santee or Eastern Dakota branches (Hall 1980: 27). Floral design on the Plains in the pre-Reservation Period was strong where the technique of overlay or spot stitch quillwork was most common, because the women artists could easily incorporate this technique into pre-existing curvilinear designs using techniques such as the one-thread, one-quill method (Conn 1986: 22; Hall 1980: 46). The earliest quillwork was executed using quills dyed from natural materials. Bright aniline dyes were developed in England beginning in 1856 and became available soon after throughout the Plains (Hall 1980:74). Of the several ways of decorating a piece with quillwork, sewing was used for creating the flowing lines of floral designs. Both the one-thread, one-quill (Figure 6) and two-thread, one-quill (Figure 7) techniques were used by the Dakota and spread to the other Plains tribes to make floral forms (Hall 1980: 48).

During the Reservation Period, beginning in the late 1870s, native peoples felt significant pressure to give up traditional lifeways in favor of European customs, including design motifs and decorative traditions—especially those associated with ceremony and religious beliefs. The

content and types of art changed significantly with the pressure of assimilation, but decorative art flourished as a way to establish personal merit and symbolize individual identity. Clothing and personal adornment became a way of both asserting a traditional way of life and incorporating assimilationist ideals of the government (Conn 1986: 26). For example, the style of the Ripley jacket is an adaptation of European military style jackets to native materials and incorporates native design motifs. This particular type of buckskin European-style decorated jacket became common after contact, and many were commissioned in the region by Native men, settlers, and soldiers alike (Hall 1980: 78). The Hood Museum of Dartmouth College contains two examples of tailored and fringed men's European-style jackets, including catalogue 46.17.9817, a coat labeled as Lakota from around 1880; and catalogue 985.47.26604, which is labeled as an early 20<sup>th</sup> century boy's coat of Dakota origins. Both of these bear resemblance to the style of the Ripley coat. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Lakota symmetrical floral designs like the example referenced above and Figure 8 below, were influenced by their Eastern Dakota neighbors and both included bilateral symmetry on plain backgrounds (Figure 9) (Conn 1986: 57-58; Koeninger et. al. 1979:23).



**Figure 8. Jacket**

Lakota, 1890s. This machine-sewn jacket is similar in cut and style to the Ripley jacket with symmetrical quilled decoration. Denver Art Museum, 1985.263.



**Figure 9. Jacket**

Sioux (Dakota), no date given. The cut, fringed-sleeves and seams, brightly-colored floral quillwork, and lined interior of this jacket recall the Ripley jacket. Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, 2.4E137.

According to Richard Conn (Conn 1986: 79), “Although their floral embroidery follows the symmetrical pattern they probably learned from the Dakota, the Lakota tended toward more substantial figures than their eastern relatives.” For exemplary comparison of Conn’s designation see *A Persistent Vision: Art of the Reservation Days* catalogue numbers 59 and 60—a vest and trousers—which bear resemblance to the Ripley outfit (Conn 1986: 78-79). In addition to the Lakota and Dakota, after 1850 the Blackfeet Nation developed a preference for floral designs and quillwork, especially including the stylized double curve and bilateral symmetry (Conn 1986: 100). Examples of Blackfeet quillwork floral designs, such as (Figure 10 and **Error! Reference source not found.**) quite resemble those of both Dakota and Lakota manufacture.



**Figure 10. Vest, Pants**

Blackfeet, no date given. The use of fringe on the outside of the leg in conjunction with a vertical design of stacked floral used in this pair of leggings is almost identical to the Ripley pair. Minor differences are in the color scheme and design pattern. The vest recalls a similar comparison to the Ripley jacket. Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, 2-2614.



**Figure 11. Vest**

Dakota, 1890s. This vest has an extremely detailed provenance, and was made at the Lower Brule Agency in South Dakota. Like the Ripley suit, it is lined and has two breast pockets. Minnesota Historical Society, 9539.4.

In addition to similar examples of jackets, vests, leggings, and pants, I have come across examples of fringed and quillwork-decorated gloves of Dakota, Lakota, and Blackfeet manufacture that also look like the gloves in the Ripley outfit (Figure 12).



**Figure 12. Gauntlets.**

Teton Sioux (Lakota), 1890s. Although these gauntlets show floral designs in conjunction with other motifs, the quill colors used and the use of both sides of the cuff as a canvas make these gauntlets similar to the Ripley gloves. Fenimore Art Museum, T0336a-b.

Although these similar objects represent a small portion of outfit sets or pieces that recall the Ripley outfit, and can help to narrow down a relative date of manufacture and regional attribution, I have not been able to find a complete outfit in any other collection. As the examples pictured here illustrate, most of the objects that bear resemblance to the Ripley outfit are either single pieces or sets of pants and vests.

Within the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History's collection, I found two pairs of moccasins which belong to a large collection donated by collected by Reverend Case and donated by his children that have floral designs and a color scheme bearing uncanny resemblance to the Ripley outfit (Figure 13 and **Error! Reference source not found.**).



**Figure 13. Moccasin.**

MHA Nation, no date. The color hues and well as the color combinations and overall layout of motif on this pair is nearly identical to the pieces of the Ripley suit. They may have even been made by the same person or in the same place. University of Colorado Museum Natural History, 33196.



**Figure 14. Moccasin.**

MHA Nation, no date. The faded colors of the quillwork on this pair and the use of bilateral symmetry make them visually similar to the Figure 13. University of Colorado Museum Natural History, 33197.

Of the two pairs, catalogue UCM 33196 uses a color scheme and pattern which most closely relates to the Ripley pieces. Although the resemblance of these moccasins to the Ripley outfit is so similar, the catalogue records do not go into any depth at all in regards to their particular life histories and provenance. Still, there is a chance that since these two pairs of moccasins and the Ripley outfit all came from the Fort Berthold reservation and that they may have been made at the same place, at the same time, or by the same person. Additionally, both pairs of moccasins and the Ripley quillwork outfit were connected to the museum through Reverend Case; he facilitated the sale of the Ripley outfit to the CU Museum, and his children donated UCM 33196 and 33197 to the museum along with other objects from his collection. Therefore, it is possible that UCM 33196 may have been originally part of the Ripley suit and may have become separated from it. Perhaps the family gifted or sold the moccasins to Case, but retained the rest of the outfit until they were in financial need. Unfortunately, without proper documentation, I can only make speculations based on visual similarities and their connection to Reverend Case. Still, these pairs and the other comparative examples help to tentatively apply a date range for the Ripley outfit and also give a better indication of what group may have produced it.

The Ripley family lived on the Fort Berthold reservation of the MHA Nation in North Dakota, but further research and some clues provided by the piece itself suggests that it may not have been originally made by a Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara person or on the Fort Berthold Reservation. Based on these lines of evidence, as well as what is known about quillwork and floral design, I would say that the quillwork outfit from the Ripley family was created by

members of Blackfeet, Dakota, or Lakota tribes between 1870 and 1890. The intricacy of the quillwork and the careful attention to the design—which is carried out in strict detail on each of the pieces of the outfit—in conjunction with the overall quality of manufacture and materials suggests that this is not an everyday item. The fact that this outfit was special and meaningful instead of common or ordinary is attested to by its relative lack of use-wear and its pristine condition. Additionally, this type of outfit was not part of the everyday attire for tribal members at this time, and would have been worn for special occasions (Hall 1980: 68). Comparatively, the floral patterns of quillwork are atypical of other Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara examples, placing the outfit further into the realm of singular and special.

With some preliminary ideas about the period and region of manufacture gleaned from the object itself, as well as catalogue information, and comparative examples, I expanded my search outward to include the acquisition information, the history of the MHA Nation, and what Mrs. Isabelle Medchill's knowledge could contribute to the life history of the outfit and the meaning it had to the Ripley family during its time at the Fort Berthold reservation. The associated documentation provides a specific ownership date and time period but does not delve further into the meanings it had for the Ripley family near Elbowoods at the Fort Berthold Reservation.

According to Medchill, the outfit was owned and worn by her grandfather, David Jackson Ripley, who lived on the reservation and obtained it in the 1880s or 1890s. The biography of the objects can only be traced as far back as their context as heirlooms after David Jackson Ripley's death, when they were in the possession of David Jackson Ripley's widow, son, and grandchildren. His family continued to treat the outfit with care, and the objects began to accrue meaning and interpretation as an heirloom. As a link to a history, memory, and past, heirlooms

are most often portable objects, which are inherited by kin due to the death of the original owner, then imbued with familial symbolism, maintained through inheritance, and restricted to certain occasions and family members (Lillios 1999: 241). That the outfit was special was further confirmed by Isabelle Medchill, who recalled that her father Jackson Ripley kept the items in a trunk along with other family heirlooms and would occasionally take it out for display. Where once an object may have been heavily or regularly used, when it is transferred as an heirloom or part of an inheritance, the object takes on a new symbolism as embodying a link to a specific past and becomes something to be kept and preserved rather than extensively used. The farther in time the object moves away from the individual who first acquired it, the greater its significance as something to be preserved, protected, and cherished. This concept is at the heart of museum work, which focuses on the collecting, storage, care, and preservation of objects of cultural significance. However, collecting, storage, classification, and care are universal attributes, and as social practices situated in particular cultural constructs (Kreps 2003: 48), they should be associated more broadly than with just Western museum models and museology. Indigenous curation also has the same basic aims as museums and curation, including a concern for cultural heritage preservation and for the transmission of culture through time (Kreps 2003: 48), and challenges the assertion that non-Western people are not concerned with the collection and preservation of their cultural property.

Although cherished belongings, ultimately the owners and indigenous curators of these heirloom objects commoditized them through sale, and the suit came to rest in a distant museum as a group of relatively dormant objects. In order to grasp the specific circumstances under which this commoditization took place, it is necessary to outline the broader history of the MHA Nation and Fort Berthold. Several centuries of social, historic, and political events preceded the outfit

leaving its owner's hands and help to make sense of the decision. This history and events such as mission work, assimilation, government oversight, and forced relocation coalesced into a set of circumstances that necessitated the sale of the jacket, gloves, and pants to the CU Museum and into the stewardship of Curator Joe Ben Wheat.

#### Fort Berthold Area History: 'Before' of Collecting

Between 1500 and 1700, the westward expansion of Europeans into the area of the Upper Missouri River created the circumstances for significant changes, leading to cultural, religious, and inter-tribal conflicts; as well as consequences from diseases and introduced species. Conflicts arose between nomadic groups, incoming communities displaced from the east, and sedentary groups like the Mandan and Hidatsa, so that this period was a time of highly contested space and place (Parker 2011: 53). As a result of a severe smallpox epidemic, in 1845 the Mandan and Hidatsa smallpox survivors banded together to create a unified village, called Like-A-Fishhook Village (Berman 1988; Parker 2011: 64). When the Mandan and Hidatsa consolidated at Like-A-Fishhook Village, the Arikara moved into the areas abandoned by the Mandan and Hidatsa and took up residence. Over the next several decades, the residents of Like-A-Fishhook Village engaged in place-making activities, accruing stories and histories that would tie them to the land. Around the same time Like-A-Fishhook village was established, Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company built Fort Berthold just above the village (Parker 2011: 65). Contact with the Fort Berthold traders had both direct and indirect consequences on Like-A-Fishhook Village, impacting traditional lifeways, occupations, and gender roles. For example, community members began to move out of earth lodges and to construct and use log cabins (Parker 2011: 66).

In 1851, the Fort Laramie treaty designated 12,500,000 acres between the Yellowstone and Mississippi River as reservation land. About a decade later, disease and inter-tribal conflicts made it advantageous for the Arikara to join the Mandan and Hidatsa from Like-A-Fishhook Village on the lands designated in the Fort Laramie treaty. In 1871, the boundaries of Fort Berthold Reservation were established, reducing territory that was outlined in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, and beginning a long history of imposed Euro-American ideas about the nature of territory and space. The Indian Agent for the area began to dictate how land was parceled and used by families in the village. It was also during this time that the federal government began to assign missionaries to reservations in efforts to promote the assimilation of native peoples to Western ways. In 1876, Charles Hall and his wife Emma arrived on the Fort Berthold Reservation and established the Congressional Church of Christ, becoming the reservation's first resident missionary (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 5). Life continued to change significantly for the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. Missionization and forced assimilation caused the decline of age-graded societies, shifts in gender-roles, and factions between traditional and assimilationist Indians.

The MHA Nation was further impacted in the 1880s by the Dawes Act, more land reductions, and forceful assimilation measures of the local Indian agent, who pressured Like-A-Fishhook residents to fully abandon their earth lodges for log houses, leading to the creation of eight communities along the Missouri River (Parker 2011: 75-76). In 1910, more land was forcibly ceded away from the Three Affiliated Tribes, creating the modern boundaries of the Fort Berthold Reservation (Parker 2011: 80). Of the 12,500,000 acres designated in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, only 640,000 remained after 1910 (Berman 1988). Assimilation efforts by the government continued in the 1930s, and efforts to promote English language use and

comprehension by all three tribes increased (Berman 1988). The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act changed the tribal government, when Fort Berthold voted to reorganize according to its stipulations, and began to draft a constitution and by-laws (Parker 2011: 109). Acceptance of and adherence to the Indian Reorganization Act helped to define enrollment, establish tribal leadership, and build infrastructure on the Fort Berthold reservation (Parker 2011: 124). Although much of the tribe believed that the reorganization would help to guarantee prosperity, this attitude quickly changed when the Fort Berthold Reservation residents became embroiled in preventing their eviction and relocation by the Garrison Dam project.

Completed in 1954, and inundating more than 150,000 acres of Reservation, the Garrison Dam represented the first instance of Indian land guaranteed by treaty being taken by the government under eminent domain, essentially undermining the status of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota as a sovereign nation (Parker 2011: 210). The residents fought against the dam for more than a decade, which involved fundraising, lobbying, and political organization; and the controversy created factions, infighting, and political unrest for the community (Parker 2011: 221). Congress appropriated funds for general flood control and provided cash compensation to the MHA Nation to cover land losses and the process of relocation, which the tribes were forced to accept. Because the original compensation was not nearly enough, a new package of several millions of additional dollars was added to the original (parker 2011: 236), a total that again proved to be inadequate. Ultimately, the dam's construction forcibly relocated about 90% of the Fort Berthold population, flooded their historic lands, and destroyed important infrastructure, with lasting and serious consequences on the native economy, society, and well-being (Berman 1988).

The relocation began in 1951, ushering in a period of political and social turmoil regarding the relocation and how it was handled by the tribe and the federal government (Parker 2011: 263). The relocation process was painful for all members, severely and irrevocably altering the social structure and traditions of the MHA Nation. After the relocation was completed in 1955, the standard of living began to plummet throughout the next decade with substandard housing, improper sanitation, reliance on welfare programs, a slow economy, and poor health and nutrition. In addition to a slow and difficult recovery, the repercussions from the damming meant a loss of agriculturally rich land, an altered way of life, and the loss of access to crucial natural resources. Important sites of memory and history such as landmarks, battle sites, gardens, and cemeteries that helped to document cultural history were also lost to the Garrison Dam. Rebuilding and place-making slowly continued, and eventually five settlements arose after relocation based on the physical landscape of the resettlement area. These five settlements became towns serving as central locations for schools, clinics, and community centers, and they all continue to exist today (Parker 2011: 305). The members of the MHA Nation felt the forces of assimilation and worked to reestablish their lives after the relocation, including the necessity of operating within a cash economy and developing Western habits such as time and nuclear family residence (Case n.d.: 5). It was within this time frame and context of social upheaval that the Ripley family sought to sell the outfit to the CU Museum in 1957, and becoming a museum artifact significantly altered the context of its meaning as heirloom.

Before the suit and gloves accrued their meaning and significance as heirloom pieces, they were part of a context of use by David Jackson Ripley on the Fort Berthold reservation. The primary production and use context involving David Jackson Ripley can be only broadly reconstructed from available resources, but it can be viewed within the greater tribal history that

was also taking place. The suit was acquired and worn by him at a time when the Fort Berthold reservation was shrinking and when mission work and assimilation pressured residents to relinquish their traditional ways. David Jackson Ripley, an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana, was born in 1877 (Medchill 2012). Ripley came to the Fort Berthold reservation in North Dakota after his marriage to Ella Ripley (nee Rickert), whom he met at the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School in Montana (Medchill 2012). The pressures and changes of life in the decades that David Jackson Ripley owned the suit were not such that it would have been practical or economical to transfer or exchange the outfit. He was able to obtain it and maintain it in pristine condition—probably bringing it with him in his move to Fort Berthold (Medchill 2012)—suggesting thoughtful and purposeful display and storage. Ripley would have worn it as a marker of identity, proudly displaying the outfit as a relatively unique item at Fort Berthold in design and manufacture, probably at times of public gathering.

After David Jackson Ripley's death, his family continued to consider the outfit significant enough to keep out of circulation or transfer out of their possession. Whether David Jackson Ripley directly passed his outfit on to specific members of his family is unknown, but it was certainly cherished by all of them. Although families maintain heirloom objects through inheritance because they have imbued them with a specific significance (Lillios 1999: 243), most heirloom pieces will invariably be removed from their contexts as important inherited symbols, and often lose their symbolism and purpose as important links to familial and personal histories. Because they are portable objects often of rare material, manufacture, or design, heirlooms have both sentimental or personal worth and monetary or economic exchange value, and are therefore subject to theft, destruction, or commoditization. Modernization is also a compelling force that encourages people to recontextualize their objects as marketable commodities—this regularly

means selling them to outsiders. In the case of the Ripley quillwork outfit, its alienation from the family who imbued it with the status of heirloom was not because it had ceased to be a powerful mnemonic to their past. Circumstances beyond their control created financial instability and uncertainty, necessitating their commoditization of the quillwork outfit. Upon the decision of Ella Ripley, David Ripley's widow, they sold the suit soon after the relocation, indicating that they were like many of their fellow residents after the relocation and fell upon dire straits (Case 1957b; Medchill 2012).

#### Garrison Dam, Relocation and Hardship: The 'Scene' of Collecting

The process of the Ripley suit leaving the Ripley family is grounded in the disruptive forces of the relocation and displacement from the Garrison Dam, and intertwined with the history of missionary work on the reservation. A key player in the transfer of the piece was Reverend Harold Case, who had been a missionary at Fort Berthold, and adds a layer of meaning and context to the process by which the suit came to reside at the CU Museum. Reverend Harold and Eva Case joined the Fort Berthold mission in 1922 to gradually assume the duties of Reverend Charles Hall, who had been Fort Berthold's missionary since 1895 (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 5). The Cases were highly involved with and dedicated to the well-being of the community of Fort Berthold Reservation, acting as catalysts for positive change and working toward a healthy community. In the 1920s and 1930s, they helped to build churches, encouraged Native Americans to enter the ministry, and worked to improve education standards. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Cases struggled alongside the people of the Reservation to reverse the plans for construction of the Garrison Dam, and when relocation became necessary, they focused on assisting with the move and then reorganizing the church (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 7). Reverend Case left Fort Berthold after the relocation in 1957 to work for the Community Relations

Ministry of North Dakota on behalf of off-reservation Indians (Case 1961: 3). The Mission Board felt that the time had come to relinquish outside control of the churches and allow the community to run them themselves.

After his retirement in 1965, Reverend Case continued to work with the Fort Berthold Reservation, continuing to accumulate and care for artifacts, but also serving on the Board of Directors of the North Dakota Historical Society and the Three Tribes Museum (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 7). Reverend Case amassed a large and spectacular collection of artifacts from members of the Three Affiliated Tribes living on the Fort Berthold reservation as gifts, tokens of gratitude, purchases, and loan collateral. These included objects of everyday use, as well as intricately beaded items of clothing and adornment belonging to both sexes and a variety of ages. Some of the objects he acquired tell elaborate stories, with connections to notable figures and events. Other objects signify personal wealth and special adornment. Each object in the collection has its own biography and personal history and has the ability to convey its stories through connections and interactions with the people who come into contact with it. Although he amassed a more than 300 items from the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, North Dakota, Case was first and foremost a Reverend, and not a systematic, scientific, or entirely purposeful collector. Still, the objects represented in his collection were of such high quality and fine work, that they were at first displayed at the CU Museum, then pursued by the museum, and finally donated to the museum by Case's children.

In the early 1940s, before the Garrison Dam and relocation, the University of Colorado "...had the privilege of exhibiting a large collection of Plains material belonging to you [Reverend Case]", then Director of the CU Museum, Hugo Rodeck writes to Reverend Harold Case in May of 1950 (Rodeck 1950). The material was loaned for the exhibition by Reverend

Case, who extended his offer of future display in a letter of gratitude in May 1941, after the material had been safely returned to his possession. The purpose of the letter from Director Hugo Rodeck in 1950 was as an inquiry and invitation based on the promise of future cooperation with the museum by Reverend Case as stated in the 1941 letter. Rodeck extends an offer to Reverend Case for the donation and safekeeping of the entire collect at the CU Museum, guaranteeing its care and adds that the museum "... finds its own collections markedly lacking in an adequate representation from this area." (Rodeck 1950). This correspondence resulted in another loan from Harold Case of objects to be displayed at the museum, but not a full donation of the objects. Although the collection was not formerly donated to the museum until well after his death by his children in 1983, Reverend Case did facilitate CU's acquisition of the set of Ripley-family objects from the Fort Berthold Reservation.

In January of 1957, after the MHA had been relocated by the Garrison Dam, Reverend Harold Case wrote to Hugo Rodeck, Director of the CU Museum, inquiring about the museum's potential interest in the purchase of a quillwork suit, briefly describing its age, condition, and context, and enclosing slides of the three pieces (Case 1957a). From the excerpted portion below, it is very clear that Reverend Case thought highly of the quality of craftsmanship and design of the piece, and is highlighting these aspects in hopes of a sale (Case 1957a):

I have run across a porcupine quill Indian suit and shirt and [I am] wondering whether the Museum would be interested in it. It is all of 70 years old and to my mind one of the finest I have laid eyes on. Porcupine work of seventy years ago really was a beautiful thing but those of more recent years.

The suit is owned by a family by the name of Ripley and she is in her eighties. They want to sell it and are asking 250.00 for the three pieces. Since it is a collectors item [I am] writing to you first. I haven[']t the slightest idea what it will bring but know that I would be happy to own it myself if I could afford it.

In this letter Reverend Case did not mention the Garrison Dam relocation project and the resulting economic instability for the MHA Nation and financial need for many families. Several months later, in May of 1957, Reverend Case wrote to Hugo Rodeck, reminded him of Rodeck of the contents of his first letter, and again inquired after the museum's interest in purchasing the suit (Case 1957b). There is a sense of underlying urgency in this second letter, as Reverend Case expressed his concern for finding a buyer. The letter used short and abrupt sentences, empathetic word choice, and seemed to be written quickly based on the typing errors (which have been left intact):

Some months ago I sent you two kodachromes showing an Indian hunting suit with porcupine and a porcupine-braded type-dancing shirt. Wondered at the time whether the museum would be interested enough to make an offer. Believe I mentioned what the folks owning the articles had hoped to get but I told them that I would ask for an offer. I do not know what they would be worth in dollars. Feel that they are excellent hand work.

Would like to give this aged woman an answer as to whether I have found a buyer. If the Museum is not in a position to make an offer or if they are not interested, please let me know. Would like the kodoschrome slides back also at your convenience. (Case 1957b)

The response given to Reverend Case is written by Joe Ben Wheat, the Curator of Anthropology, rather than Hugo Rodeck. Wheat expressed his interest in the suit, tendered an offer based on comparative research and valuation at another institution, and requested the suit sent to the CU Museum for his examination (Wheat 1957a). In the final letter, dated nearly 10 months after his original request, Reverend Case expressed his gratitude that the museum was able to acquire the suit, "The check for Ripley came thru and thanks. [I am] glad the articles were disposed of and the family were happy to have the much needed money" (Case 1957b).

Reading between the lines of these several correspondences between Case and the CU Museum, and with the history of the Fort Berthold reservation in mind, the motivations and contexts for its transfer out of the Ripley family come into focus. The "aged woman" Reverend

Case referred to in his second letter to Director Huge Rodeck is David Jackson Ripley's Widow Ella Ripley. Although the suit had become an heirloom to the entire Ripley family and had begun to accrue meaning outside of its use context by David Jackson Ripley, it was Ella Ripley who legally alienated the suit from the family (Case 1957b; Medchill 2012). Desperately needing money as the standard of life plummeted around them and with the difficulty of adjusting to post-relocation living, the family looked for ways to keep afloat (Case 1957; Medchill 2012). They recognized the possibility of economic and exchange value in the quillwork suit and transformed it into a liquid asset. Reverend Case amassed a large and spectacular collection of artifacts from members of the Three Affiliated Tribes living on the Fort Berthold reservation as gifts and tokens of gratitude for his extraordinary service (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 7), many of which have now come to reside in the CU Museum. In addition to receiving tribally-made objects as gifts, Reverend Case also had a history of purchasing artifacts from the members of the MHA Nation (Kohlhoff et. al. 1988: 7), so the Ripley family approached him as a possible point of exchange. When he was not willing or able to pay the high asking price of the suit, but still wanting to help the family, he became a middleman of exchange. Based on his previous interactions in the loaning and display of his own personal collection in Boulder, Reverend Case judged the CU Museum as a reasonable choice for appeal and solicited the museum to buy the piece. The family at first placed a valuation of \$250.00 on the three items, a value that Joe Ben Wheat researched to determine whether or not it was a fair asking price (Wheat 1957a). In his response letter to Reverend Case, Wheat admits the difficulty of assessing value, but continues on to suggest a price to Case:

In the past I have found considerable difficulty in estimating the value of such specimens. Recently, however, we have gotten a catalogue of the famous Heath collection owned by the Logan Museum in Beloit, Wisconsin. Using evaluations for similar specimens from the Heath collection we have arrived at a tentative offer of \$200. If this is a satisfactory

offer we should appreciate receiving the suit for examination, and if the suit is satisfactory we will send the covering check. (Wheat 1957a)

Knowing how much the family at first asked, and the negotiations and reasoning with which Joe Ben Wheat offered a lower value are evidence of the necessity of the family to obtain money. It is logical that given their dire economic and social situation in combination with the familial importance of the suit, that they would assign a high monetary value to the suit. Even before it left the Reservation, the Ripley suit transformed from heirloom to asset to collateral to collectors' item, and finally to museum piece. The suit accrued many simultaneous and mutually inclusive meanings, contexts, and interpretations as the Ripley family, Reverend Case, Hugo Rodeck, and Joe Ben Wheat interacted with it. Each of these actors brought their own meanings and interpretations to the objects, which were independent of the others. Unfortunately when Reverend Case assisted the family in facilitating the sale and transfer of the suit, he distanced the sellers from the buyer, which created an opportunity for the potential loss of information relating to the original contexts and meanings that the suit had accrued during its time with the Ripley family. When the transaction had taken place and the Wheat acquired the suit, it entered into the museum missing portions of its life history, which were lost in the transfer from the family through Reverend Case and to the CU Museum.

### Life in the Museum

At the time that the Ripley suit entered into the museum, the handful of brief letters was the only documentation regarding its origins, meaning, and history. To Joe Ben Wheat, its condition, age, aesthetic qualities, collectability, and price far outweighed the importance of its life history, which was not taken up as part of the museum's permanent archival records. Until Isabelle had begun searching for it, it seemed that the family had little interest in knowing the

details of the outfit's final resting place after they sold it with the help of Reverend Case. It was not until members from its life-phase as heirloom became interested in its final disposition, more than five decades later, that work was done to reconstruct its biography. Isabelle Medchill, who is David Jackson and Ella Ripley's granddaughter, knew that this family heirloom had left her family and worked sought out what had happened to it after it left her family, beginning with the documents about Reverend Case held in the North Dakota Heritage Center (Medchill 2012). In her search, she came upon the CU Museum webpage's "Object of the Month", which happened to be highlighting a large collection from Reverend Case.

Medchill was in boarding school when her family reached out to Reverend Case in 1957 about selling the outfit (Medchill 2012). Although she couldn't speak to the suit's specific origins, Isabelle Medchill shared the meaning and significance the suit had for her family based on her own memories of the suit as a child. Additionally, during her visit, it became emotionally difficult for Medchill to share specific details of her family and their history immediately after the relocation, so there may be more to the story than she was able to share with the museum. With that said however, she feels happy that the outfit came to the museum, where it has been carefully preserved, unlike other family heirlooms which were stolen from the Ripleys—had the outfit remained in the trunk with the other heirlooms, it too would have been stolen (Medchill 2012). The outfit continues to work as an heirloom for her and her family even though it is not directly in their possession and has not been for several decades, and now again is linked to its descendants.

## Conclusion

Hours of labor went into the making of the Ripley quillwork outfit, which as the museum learned in the creation of a new dialogue, was an important identity piece worn with pride by David Jackson Ripley and then treated as an heirloom to his living relatives, which included his wife Ella Ripley, their children, and their grandchildren. The outfit is a meaningful heirloom for Medchill, and developing a dialogue with the museum was an important part of reconnecting with and sharing her heritage. Because heirlooms act as memory aids for remembering, and provide illustrations for telling meaningful histories (Cruikshank 1995: 25), when Isabelle Medchill shared her personal associations and family stories about the object, the museum learned important contexts and meanings about the suit. Although this type of renewal between indigenous communities and objects of their heritage can only recover fragments of earlier meaning (Gosden 1999: 177), the dialogue Isabelle Medchill created with the CU Museum represents a larger effort by museums to engage in the responsible stewardship in the spirit of cultural preservation.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Woman's Buckskin Dress – UCM 16245

#### Introduction

A common practice during many wars is for troops to gather and collect the material items leftover from military victories as souvenirs and mementos of their exploits, after their enemies have fled or been overtaken. This type of mobile and concomitant or incidental collecting (O'Hanlon 2000:10) was based on common knowledge shared by soldiers and settlers alike and not on inadvertent discoveries. It represents one of many ways in which objects became private collections and also came to rest in museum collections. In fact, "members of the United States Army stationed at posts on the Plains during the Indian wars of the 1860s, '70s, and '80s constituted a generally reliable type of collector, bringing back trophies from specific battles or from trades directly with native craftsmen" (Hall 1980: 29). One would be hard-pressed not to find at least one object or collection within a United States museum that was the result of battlefield souvenir collecting. Battles like Wounded Knee and the Sand Creek Massacre have produced examples of these objects that can be found in the collections of national museums like the Smithsonian (Graffe 1999: 66) or the Indian Arts Research Center at the School for Advanced Research (Anderson 2007: 112), as well as regional museums like the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology (Hall 1980: 131). Unfortunately, many of the objects within these types of collections contain little documentation regarding their use contexts and meanings, so they rely on other well-provenienced and well-documented objects to provide insight through comparison.

Although the circumstances surrounding the actual collecting of these objects is often known and very specifically documented, their pre-collecting contexts are scarcely known or were lost in the process of collection. This has been the case for a handful of objects currently scattered in public collections whose origins are linked to the Nez Perce War of 1877—the origins of their acquisition can be reliably dated and precisely provenienced, but their pre-collecting life histories are not as well preserved (see Graffe 1999). The CU Museum has at least two separate collections which were created during military service as souvenirs of wars or battles, including a collection from the Spanish-American War in the Philippines and a collection of two objects from the Nez Perce War.

The collection acquired from a battlefield during the Nez Perce War consists of a twined apocynum storage bag, and a woman's hide dress with a yoke of heavy beading extending around the shoulders and onto the chest, with accents of fringing along the seams, and a beaded awl case sewn to the yoke. If not for the detailed and historical circumstances under which it was collected, this hide dress would be just an example of the beaded clothing representative of Nez Perce and other Plateau and Plains groups between 1850 and 1900. This dress, UCM 16245, was found in a cache in association with the twined apocynum storage bag after the Battle of Clearwater Creek, during the Nez Perce War in 1877. It was discovered and recovered, not by its original owners, but by an army surgeon, who among other American soldiers and civilians had learned the common practice of seeking out and excavating the caches of Nez Perce material that had been deposited by their owners for safekeeping and later retrieval (Graffe 1999: 65; Greene 2001: 322; Scott 1994: 9). The aftermath of the Clearwater battlefield is illustrative of this common practice of military officials and civilians going through the personal, domestic, and ceremonial items left behind after the Nez Perce tribal members fled their campsites. In

particular, as Graffe notes in his study of 1870s Nez Perce decorative arts, “many items now known to have been recovered and kept as souvenirs of the Nez Perce War were retrieved after the Battle of the Clearwater River, fought on July 11-12, 1877” (Graffe 1999: 65).

Speaking about the Clearwater battlefield, General Otis Howard recollected that the “Indian camp, abandoned in haste, had the lodges still standing, filled with their effects—blankets, buffalo robes, cooking utensils, food cooking on the fires, flour, jerked beef, and plunder of all descriptions.” (Howard 1881: 166). Volunteer aide-de-camp Thomas Sutherland also recalled a great abundance of Nez Perce items, “. . .hundreds of buffalo robes, skins of all kinds in abundance, camas and kous roots dried and in flour, quantities of dried beef, with their different utensils—in fact their entire camp equipage, was captured. . .” (Sutherland 1980: 13). George Miller Sternberg, who was serving as an army surgeon when he recovered these two pieces from the cache, attributed them to the Nez Perce among Chief Joseph’s group, a claim that still elevates them today. The historical significance of the dress, although related to a major shift in context and meaning, and part of the piece’s history for nearly 150 years, constitutes only a small portion of its entire life history. The meaning that Western audiences—George Sternberg, Curator Joe Ben Wheat, museum professionals, and others—read into the dress as treasures and historical souvenirs are different than the way that the objects would have been treasured in their original contexts. Drawing from museum, archival, and historic sources, in this chapter I reconstructed the trajectory of UCM 16245, women’s dress from the place where it was originally used to the life it leads in the CUMNH. By following traces and reconstructing a biography for this dress, I explored aspects of colonial and political relationships, especially those between the United States government and groups of the Nez Perce tribe, illustrated the

common practice of looting caches, and highlighted one specific way in which objects or collections have come into museums.

### Object Properties

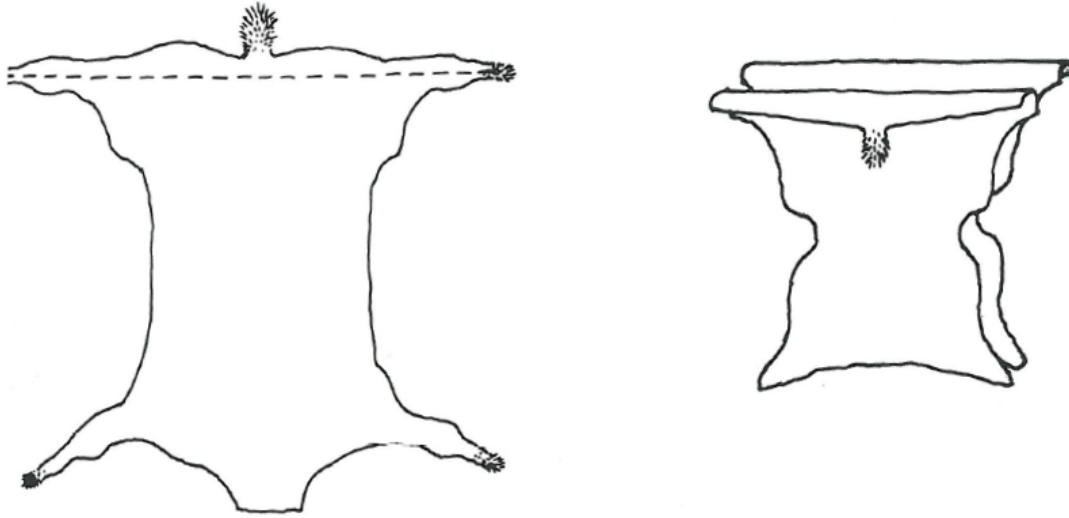
This antelope skin dress was made and worn by a female member of the Nez Perce tribe, at some time prior to 1877, when it acquired a new owner in the aftermath of the Clearwater battle. Object UCM 16245 is an antelope skin dress with a yoke of simple geometric seed bead pattern of several colors, accented by fringing, and described as a tail-dress because of the portion of tail accenting the center of the yoke (Figure 15). It is labeled as “Chief Joseph Dress”, for its supposed association with the famous Chief Joseph, a chief of one of the Nez Perce bands that were part of the Nez Perce War.



**Figure 15. Dress.**

Nez Perce, 1860-1877. Women's two-hide dress with fringing on the seams, and a beaded yoke of yellow, dark blue, and light blue seed beads. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 16245.

The dress is in the so-called “binary”, “two-hide”, “deertail”, “deer-tail”, or “tail-dress” style, worn by Plains, Plateau, and Great Basin women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Figure 16) (Hall 1980: 88-89).



**Figure 16. Two-hide dress.**

Showing construction method, with the skins oriented with the tail at the top of the dress. (Hall 1980: 88)

This style consists of two full elk, mule deer, or bighorn sheep skins sewn together to create a dress, with the neck, legs, and tail parts left intact as decorative elements (Hall 1989: 89; Fennimore Art Museum n.d.; NMAI n.d.). As was common for two-hide dresses, UCM 16245 is oriented with the hides head down (Jennys 2004: 10). The full hides with intact tails are almost mirror images of one another, and the shoulder seam was sewn in a straight line a few inches below the hind parts of the skin, creating an overall hourglass silhouette (Hall 1980: 89). The hind parts of the two deerskins were then folded over the shoulder seam so that the tail and hind legs hung down and formed an “undulating” yoke across the front and back of the dress (Fennimore Art Museum n.d.; Jenny 2004: 10; NMAI n.d.). The tails of the skins were left intact and became focal pieces of the yoke, oriented to sit in the center of the chest and back of the dress (Hall 1980: 89). The yoke was then decorated with vibrant bands and of pony and seed beads and other decorative embellishments (NMAI n.d.). The decoration on the yoke followed the lines of the original skins, creating a scalloped or wavy line (Hall 1980: 89). The beaded

fringe below the yoke on UCM 16245 is typical of Plateau-style dresses (Jennys 2004: 11), and uses larger beads in blue, red, or green instead of the small pony and seed beads for decoration (NMAI 2008: 28). The skirt of the dress is formed from the forelegs and produces a fuller silhouette than the hindquarters (NMAI 2008: 28). Fringing was used along the seams connecting the hides, as well as along the bottom of the dress.

The transverse neck opening for UCM 16245 is trimmed on either side by beadwork in a pattern similar to that of the rest of the yoke, and a beaded awl case is affixed by a leather strip to the front of the dress, near the neckline. A pattern of seed beads covers the entire yoke, extending past the shoulders, and ending in a scalloped “V” shape. Although relatively simple, the beaded pattern on the yoke is heavy and detailed, consisting of a solid powder blue background with thick, vertical columns of yellow and dark blue beads in varying thicknesses. With the dress oriented so that the front faces the viewer in the position that it would be worn, the overall beaded pattern of the yoke exhibits mirrored symmetry across the vertical plane of the dress on both the front and back. Below the yoke of beadwork is a leather fringe to which are attached strands of large, opaque powder blue globular glass beads and smaller, translucent red pony beads in alternating blocks of color. The red beads of the fringe are positioned below the powder blue background of the yoke, while the powder blue globular beads are positioned below the vertical columns of dark blue and yellow beads of the yoke. The fringe extends beyond the strand of beads loosely down the front and back of the dress. There is also fringing along the sides where the two hides are stitched together, and along the bottom of the dress. The overall condition of the dress is good, with signs of use wear.

#### Manufacture and Materials

In the early 1800s, “certain tribes west of the Plains—the Nez Perce, Flathead, Eastern Shoshone, and Ute—adopted many of the attributes of Plains material culture...such as highly decorated hide clothing” (Hall 1980: 29). The general form of two-hide dresses is more or less the same across the Plains, Plateau, and Great Basin, and it was not until the introduction of trade items such as beads that women started decorating their dresses differently and specific tribal designs emerged. The style probably dates well before 1800, and may be documented as far back as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, in 1804 (Hall 1980: 89). The introduction of European and Euro-American trade goods in the 1800s greatly influenced tribal material culture and design. By the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women of the Northern Plains, Plateau, and Great Basin preferred the two-hide style of dress, due to their reliance on horses and a semi-mobile lifestyle (NMAI 2008: 2). The two-hide dresses made it easier to ride on horseback and were useful for protection against the colder climates of the region. (NMAI 2008: 2). Before the widespread introduction of European and Euro-American trade goods, the yokes of two-hide dresses were decorated using natural paints and dyes (Figure 17) (NMAI 2008: 29).



**Figure 17. Two-hide dress.**

Arikara, ca. 1840. Early two-hide dress with red and blue-green paint decorating the yoke. National Museum of the American Indian, 12/8931.

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the fur trade, an influx of new European and Euro-American materials and resources circulated through trade, and influenced Native dress styles in the Plains and Plateau regions (Hall 1980: 51). Women, who typically were responsible for clothing their families, quickly found adaptive ways to add items such as glass beads and wool cloth to their clothing designs and material culture items. Instead of replacing traditional items, these new trade goods were added to the repertoire of traditional materials and designs used in the manufacture of clothing and other domestic and ceremonial goods. Glass beads were often

used in conjunction with quillwork, allowed for experimentation with a diverse palette of colors, and encouraged new techniques and designs. Eventually, regional and tribal beading styles emerged as markers of identity and belonging, which allowed for the identification of regional classification schemes. Knowledge of the introduction, use, and spread of trade materials—such as glass beads—throughout native regions is helpful for attributing a relative date and provenience to ethnographic items such as clothing, tools, storage equipment, ornaments, and other material culture paraphernalia. Comparative analysis and examination of the spread of trade goods can also suggest emergence of styles, interaction between groups, and the transmission of trends and designs.

Around 1840, small beads called seed beads entered into the trading sphere and began to replace the earlier pony beads (Hall 1980: 51). The small seed beads came in a greater variety of colors, and allowed for more complex and intricate designs (NMAI 2008: 27). Subsequent to the introduction of seed beads, regional trends began to form in the 1860s and 1870s (Hall 1980:55). Although using the seed beads allowed for more artistic license than the earlier bead styles, pony beads and other large glass trade beads continued to be used in decoration (Graffe 1999:70). Women's dresses are an example of this and specific colors and designs on their clothing, which included a variety of bead types and colors, began to identify tribal membership and identity. As sources of pride in their tribal membership and ways of life, women learned these regional styles—as well as associated artistic and spiritual knowledge—as they were passed down through generations.

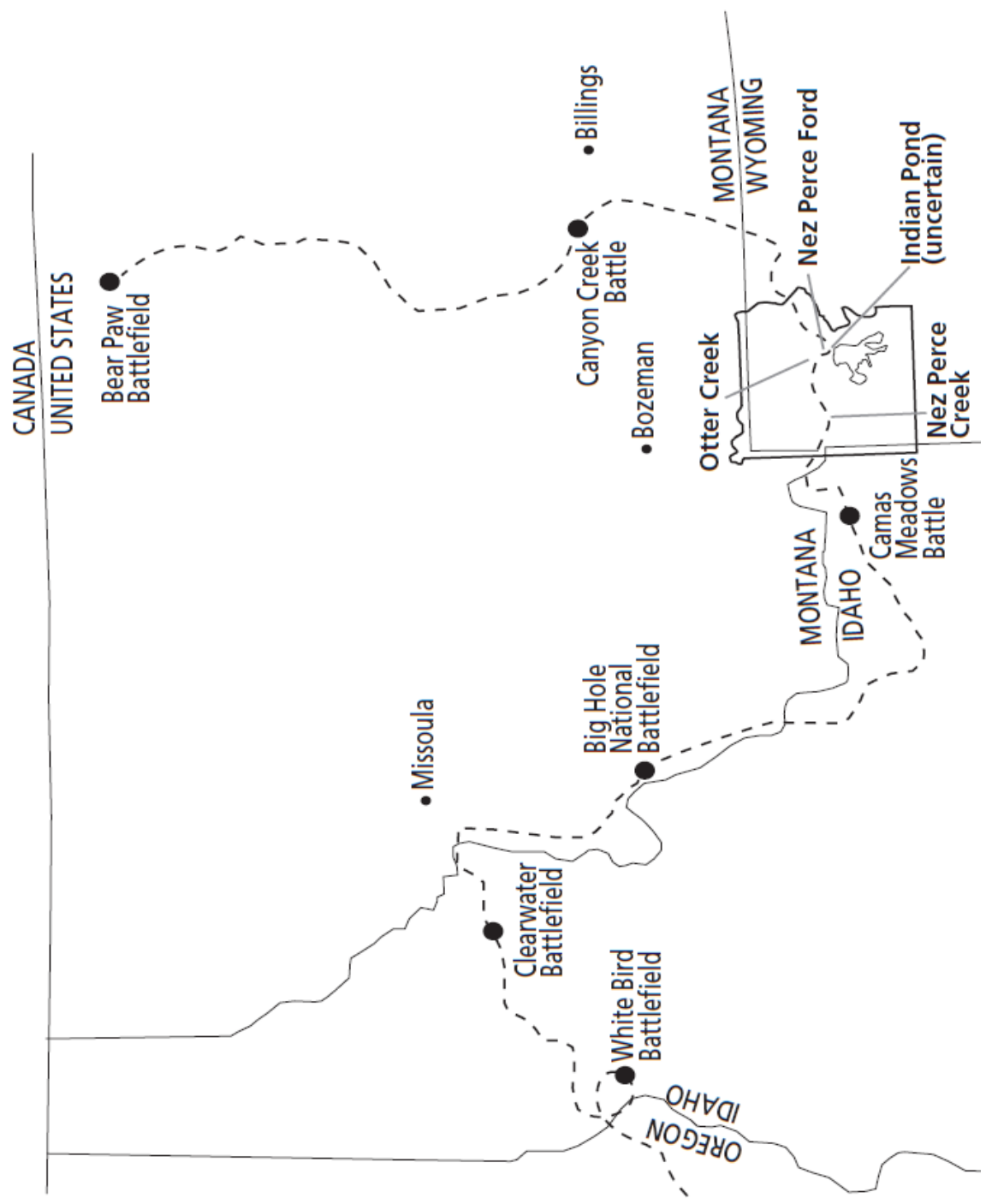
Like all clothing, time and care was taken to create a woman's dress and the maker used her designs to express her own creativity, artistry, and workmanship. Dresses with intricate and

elaborate decoration and design were often reserved for special occasions and ceremonies (FitzGerald 1986: 290). Two-hide dresses like UCM 16245 would have been part of special occasion attire when it was created and would have carried significant meaning for its makers and wearers. After the 1860s and into the Reservation Period after the 1870s, women's formal dress for many Plains groups included a yoke of colorful beading (Penney 1992: 186). The relatively simple patterning and limited color use, as well as the older and larger trade beads on the fringed yoke, suggests that this dress was created as regional styles were beginning to emerge with the introduction of seed beads. This dress has a clear provenience and tribal affiliation, because it was collected under very specific circumstances. The date of its creation and use is not as certain, but the beadwork, design, and overall stylistic elements are a good example of how trade items and regional preferences are used to identify a relative date of manufacture. Although caution must be taken when using comparative and relative dating of trade materials, because the specific date and location of the dress are well-known, the year 1877 provides a *terminus ante quem*—or date of latest manufacture—for which the dress could have been made. Based on the use of seed beads and the recognizable regional trend of Plateau beadwork, the dress was most likely made and worn in the 1860s and into the 1870s.

#### Nez Perce War of 1877: 'Before' of Collecting

The circumstances surrounding the actual acquisition of the two-hide women's dress and the associated apocynum fiber bag are a well-documented shift in context and meaning from personal identity marker and special occasion outfit to souvenir and spoil of war. This shift occurred in the larger context of a war between Americans and members of the Nez Perce tribe that significantly altered the lives and lifeways of many Nez Perce tribal members. The transfer of ownership—more a seizure of property—is but one example of the looting that took place

after the many skirmishes between United States Army members and Nez Perce Indians in latter half of 1877 (FitzGerald 1986; Howard 1881; McWhorter 1952; Sutherland 1980). Although battlefield loot generally yields artifacts of war, we also find domestic and women's material on or near battlefields, especially for battlefields that were in close proximity to encampments. Although the dress and the storage bag were acquired in the aftermath of the Battle of Clearwater, which took place between July 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 1877, the Nez Perce War did not officially come to an end until Chief Joseph's formal surrender on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1877 after the Battle of Bear Paw in Montana (Cook 1981: 30). Between the Battle of Clearwater and the Battle of Bear Paw, the Nez Perce band was actively pursued by American troops, and engaged in skirmishes and conflict during the ensuing months, as they continued to flee (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Detailing the events of the Nez Perce War up until the Battle of Clearwater Creek will help to reconstruct the circumstances and reasons why a women's treasured personal item came to be recovered from the ground and taken by a representative of the United States military.



**Figure 18. Map of Nez Perce War.**

Showing route of Nez Perce flight and battle locations, including Clearwater (National Park Service 2005).

During the Nez Perce War, life changed dramatically for many Nez Perce bands, as they were forced to give up their traditional lands and relocate to a new reservation. Ultimately, the relocation cost many members much more than their traditional homeland. Chief Joseph and several other chiefs led nearly 700 men, women, and children, as well as a substantial number of livestock across Montana and Idaho over several months in 1877 (Dusenberry 1952: 43). The details, losses, and victories of the war have been recorded by both sides mainly in the form of eyewitness accounts from those who experienced it (Scott 1994: 7). Later scholars and authors have utilized the eyewitness accounts in order to get a more well-rounded and representative picture of the events of the war, because the details are heavily weighted to the experiences and perception of the soldiers and civilian volunteers who served on the side of the United States.

In the “Treaty with the Nez Perces, 1855,” the Nez Perce tribe ceded more than 5 million acres of traditional tribal land, but still retained the right to hunt and fish there (National Park Service 2013). The treaty also established a Nez Perce reservation in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon territories (Dusenberry 1952: 43; National Park Service 2013). The discovery of gold in the Nez Perce reservation area in 1860 and an influx of new settlers caused the government to re-evaluate the size of the Nez Perce reservation. The Treaty of 1863 claimed an additional several million acres from the Nez Perce and left them with a small reservation of less than 750,000 acres in Idaho, near Fort Lapwai (National Park Service 2013). Two factions developed in the treaty “negotiations” of 1863 between the mostly-Christian bands that lived inside the proposed area for the new reservation who agreed to the new treaty and the self-identified more traditional bands (Brown 1972: 4; National Park Service 2013). Eventually, General Oliver O. Howard called a council and June 16, 1877 was designated as the day when all of the remaining Nez

Perce bands who had not agreed to or participated in the 1863 treaty were required to relocate to the new reservation in Idaho (Cook 1981: 3). Howard's order only gave the non-treaty bands about 30 days to fully relocate to the new reservation, but the bands prepared to attempt the relocation (Dusenberry 1952: 45; Haines 1954:1). Chief Joseph, who would become the most notable and remembered figure of the war, was among the non-treaty Nez Perce, and gathered his band on the Camas Prairie after crossing the Snake River, near the boundary of what would become their former reservation (Dusenberry 1952: 45; Haines 1954: 1).

On June 14, 1877, several days before the non-treaty Nez Perce were set to begin their several-hundred-mile trek to Fort Lapwai, three young Nez Perce men participated in an act of blood revenge which killed a number of white men and also in a raid which killed additional white settlers (Cook 1981: 4; Dusenberry 1952: 45). These hostile actions formally ignited hostilities between the United States and the non-treaty Nez Perce and set in motion the flight of the Nez Perce over 1000 miles and across several states over the course of 4 months (Cook 1981: 4; Dusenberry 1952: 45; Haines 1954: 1; Scott 1994: 8). In response to the killings, General Howard gathered a force of soldiers and set out to pursue the non-treaty bands, while Captain David Perry led a separate cavalry to arrest the Nez Perce men guilty of the murders and begin to escort the remaining bands to the new reservation lands near Fort Lapwai, Idaho (Cook 1981: 5; Haines 1954: 4; National Park Service 2013). As Captain Perry marched upon the Nez Perce campsite at White Bird Canyon on June 17, he was greeted by a group of Nez Perce warriors who sent a truce party ahead to meet the soldiers (National Park Service 2013). The Nez Perce scouts had alerted their camp to the approach of the soldiers and the women, elderly, and children had been led along with the livestock to a safer location (Cooke 1981: 5). Captain Perry's forces opened fire upon the Nez Perce truce party without command and a battle ensued

with no foresight or planning (Brown 1972: 6). Perry's men quickly became disorganized and disoriented, and began to retreat, leaving their weapons as they fled (Cook 1981: 4). The Nez Perce had no casualties and quickly moved on after they collected the abandoned weaponry of Captain Perry's troops as personal war booty.

General Howard pursued the "hostile" tribe, and on his way caused a formerly neutral Chief Looking Glass to join up with the non-treaty Nez Perce at their encampment on the Clearwater River in Idaho (Cook 1981: 7). Coming upon the encampment of non-treaty Nez Perce at Clearwater River, General Howard led a large force of men in a surprise attack over July 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> during which both sides suffered casualties (Scott 1994: 9). As the fighting ensued, Chief Joseph led the non-fighting members of the Nez Perce as well as their animals and supplies away from the battlefield (Cook 1981: 8; Haines 1954: 5).

#### After Clearwater, Looting Caches for War Booty: 'Scene of Collecting'

In their flight, many Nez Perce left behind carefully hidden deposits of food and personal belongings in hopes of later retrieving them (Scott 1994: 9). However, the Nez Perce did not return to Clearwater Creek because the American troops continued to pursue them for several more months until they surrendered in Montana. In fact, Clearwater Creek was not the only place that members of the Nez Perce tribe hid objects that they were unable to retrieve—it was common practice to do so (Greene 2001; Howard 1881; McWhorter 1954). Of notable example is the Bear Paw Battlefield, where the Nez Perce finally surrendered to US troops. The battlefield continued to attract interest and visitors after the encounter ended and even after soldiers had taken their pick of caches and loot (Greene 2001: 322). Because they often hastily fled the advances of American battalions, the non-treaty Nez Perce were able to carry little to no items,

save the clothing that they were wearing. This meant that cumbersome artifacts of domestic use, special occasion clothing, and ceremonial items were all left behind in encampments, sometimes within the teepees of their owners. At several battle sites, including Camas Prairie, Clearwater, and Bear Paw, the non-treaty Nez Perce had enough time to bury in caches significant personal belongings that could not be easily carried, which they intended to dig up and retrieve later.

It became common practice for the American troops who overran abandoned Indian campsites and to seek portable treasures to collect as souvenirs. A large portion of dated and well-documented Nez Perce material was gathered in the context of this mobile, concomitant or incidental collecting (O'Hanlon 2000:13) and immediate aftermath of the Nez Perce war, and has subsequently come to reside in public collections (Graffe 1999: 64). The items assembled by soldiers as war loot in the context of the Nez Perce war illustrate the material culture of the non-Treaty Nez Perce at this time, and create a better understanding of the lifeways of the non-treaty Nez Perce during this period. Souvenirs were acquired in this manner as early as the first skirmish between Captain Perry and the Nez Perce at White Bird Canyon in June of 1877 (Graffe 1999: 64). Many eyewitness accounts describe how civilian scouts and packers knew that it was not unusual for the Nez Perce to create caches of personal and significant belongings (Graffe 1999: 64-67). These scouts and packers often were more situationally local to the individual battlefields than the soldiers and at first served as intermediaries for soldiers wishing to acquire artifacts (O'Hanlon 2000: 15). Eventually, they taught the soldiers how to locate and excavate these undisturbed caches, uncovering fine, beautiful, and old artifacts which the soldiers obtained through sale or their own personal excavation. The caches were described as holes in the ground 3-4 feet wide and six feet deep that were covered with earth and smoothed over to blend into the surrounding earth (Graffe 1999: 65).

After the battle of Clearwater, General Howard did not immediately pursue the Nez Perce, instead deciding to camp near the battlefield which gave his troops ample opportunity to explore and plunder the abandoned Nez Perce camp (Cook 1981: 8). Writing about the Clearwater battlefield, Second Lieutenant Harry Lee Brady noted that “after the long battle, we camped in the place just occupied by the Indians, and we had an interesting time ‘going through’ the large amount of plunder...I can only carry a small proportion of the many ‘relics’ that were found” (McWhorter 1952: 327-328). Second Lieutenant Brady donated several items to the Allen County Historical Society, which were returned to the Nez Perce in 1998 and now are housed at the Nez Perce Historical Park in Spaulding, Idaho (Graffe 1999: 66). He also described how the packers for the troops and nearby citizens showed the soldiers how to find caches underground through prodding with stakes, and then how the packers, citizens, and soldiers all helped themselves to each cache they uncovered—which were full of foods, jewelry, and other fine goods (McWhorter 1952: 322). Captain Whipple also recovered booty from the battlefield including a partially-decorated deer-tail dress, which now resides at the Peabody Essex Museum at Harvard (Graffe 1999: 66).

The CU Museum objects UCM 16245 and UCM 16245 were the result of collecting by American troops who descended on Nez Perce encampments at the Clearwater battlefield, after their battalions had defeated the Nez Perce warriors and driven the tribe into flight. This created a new chapter in the life history of these two objects, including a substantial and a dramatic shift in context and meaning. What had been a treasured personal belonging and special occasion attire for a female Nez Perce tribal member who owned the dress immediately was transformed when army surgeon George Miller Sternberg unearthed it and recovered it from its cache. As a male American military official, the context George Miller Sternberg brought to the object could

have not been more opposed to that of its original owner. To Sternberg, the dress and the storage bag represented a special kind of souvenir, and his personal notes are evidence that as the new owner he applied more than just the label of spoil or loot in his interpretation to the cache items.

George Miller Sternberg, an army surgeon, was at the Clearwater battlefield and assigned the task of caring for and transporting the wounded soldiers to Fort Lapwai. Sternberg's collection was an impressive one, or so remarked the wife of Fort Lapwai's post surgeon after the arrival of Sternberg and the wounded soldiers:

You should see some of the Indian garments that were taken from the camp the day of the battle when the Indians left in such a hurry. They are made of beautifully tanned skin, soft as chamois skin, and cut something like we used to cut our paper dollie dresses. The bottom is fringed and the body part down the waist is heavily beaded. You never see such bead work, and the beads make them so heavy. These, of course, are their costumes for grand occasions. One of them I could not lift. Then they have leggings to match, and if it is a chief or big man, they have an outfit for his horse of the same style. Doctor Sternberg is an enthusiast of the subject of collecting curiosities, and he purchased from men who had gotten them, four or five of these garments. For one, he gave ten dollars in coin, and for another with a horse fixing, 25 dollars. So you see, they must be handsome.  
(FitzGerald 1986: 290)

George Miller Sternberg's wife also attested to the knowledge of the packers regarding locating the battlefield caches, "From these caches beautiful beaded ceremonial robes, belts, rugs and trinkets were taken out and sold to the officers. They were well covered with sod and so smoothly buried that no one not accustomed to this habit would have dreamed of locating them" (Sternberg 1920: 61). Beyond just war souvenirs, Sternberg treasured his pieces of war booty as beautiful pieces of art and admired them for their aesthetics and craftsmanship

From his collection, Sternberg gave one beaded dress to a Washington, D.C. architect, whose daughter donated it to the Smithsonian in 1956 (Graffe 1999: 66). Attesting to the movable nature of the pieces and the significance attached to them by the Sternbergs, the current

whereabouts of all the pieces George Miller Sternberg acquired are mostly unknown. After Sternberg's death, Martha Sternberg donated the hide dress, UCM 16245, and a fiber bag, UCM 16246, from her husband's collections to Representative Edward Keating as a thank you for securing a pension for her (Sternberg n.d.: 1). In her letter to Keating she briefly described the pieces and the circumstances under which her husband acquired them:

I send to your office in the Congressional Office Building a package. It contains a beaded Indian Robe and a bag to carry extra baggage on the pony. These articles came from a "Cache" on the "Clear Water Battlefield". The night after the close, exciting, and uncertain battle, the Indian realized they could not hold the field. The women, and the men, not on the firing line, worked hard to bury the extra baggage and family trapping and the entire band stole away in the early morning hours in light marching order. (Sternberg n.d.: 1)

Like her husband, Mrs. George Miller Sternberg valued these pieces as movable property that could be easily alienated from her possession. She valued them differently than her husband, who had treated them as fascinating and beautiful mementos to be treasured. That Martha Sternberg may have shared some of these same value assessments for the dress and bag is suggested in her use of them as thank you gifts. During their life in the possession of the Sternbergs, the objects acquired meaning in their life histories as trophies, show pieces, aesthetic artworks, and even gifts of gratitude.

### Life in the Museum

The CU Museum obtained the same dress and apocynum fiber bag in 1966 estate of Edward Keating (Wheat 1966a). The pair of objects were gifted along with Keating's personal documents and papers as estate items to the University of Colorado Library, and finally entered into the realm of museum artifact when the library transferred them to the care of the CU Museum. In 1963, Edward Keating wrote to University Director of Libraries Ralph E. Ellsworth

to inform him "...Mrs. Keating and I decided to give the University of Colorado Library my personal papers, correspondence, documents, some of my books and some personal memorabilia" (Keating 1963). The "personal memorabilia" included the two-hide dress and apocynum storage bag was transferred to the CU Museum due to their nature as material culture artifacts.

From its original acquisition to its final disposition to the CU Museum, each of the context shifts of the dress and bag had been through concomitant and incidental collecting, wherein objects are obtained as byproducts of other goals and collections are not likely to be representative (O'Hanlon 2000: 13). In the context of the museum, the set was given the status of significant and important due to their impeccable condition, age, and historical association. Unlike many other ethnographic objects of great age, the set had retained its associated documentation in the secondary movements outside of its original home. Although their associated documentation is retained to varying degrees by the time they come to reside in museums, ethnographic objects and collections nevertheless undergo a process of estrangement and loss. Collecting means a loss of Native use value, and "...every time an object changes hands it moves another step away from its original home, and its usefulness as an ethnographic document is compromised" (Jacknis 2002: 72).

In his acknowledgement of the receipt of the two items from the Edward Keating estate, Curator Joe Ben Wheat remarks how the historical association with the Nez Perce War enhances their value (Wheat 1966b, Letter to John Brennan: 1). In his letter of thanks to Mrs. Keating, Wheat states, "They are beyond doubt, the finest specimens of Plain Indian materials now in the Museum, both in terms of their beauty and rarity and in terms of the historical documentation which accompanied them, and they greatly enhance our collection of material from the Plains"

(Wheat 1966b). Curator Joe Ben Wheat brought several new contexts to the objects once they became part of the museum. Although the two still retained their designations as gifts and souvenirs, they had now become representative scientific specimens, objects of historical significance, and signifiers of the status and importance of the museum and its anthropology collections—among other designations.

In museums, objects such as the two-hide dress set the tone through which a representation of a culture is understood. The completeness of documentation from first acquisition and later transactions and the associated historical provenience information set the two-hide dress up to have become a significant object in the University of Colorado Museum's collection. At some point in its life as souvenir, this set of objects gained the attribution of being owned by or associated with Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. While this attribution is doubtful and the pair is more likely from a member of Chief Joseph's band, it is understandable and not uncommon among material culture collected from battlefields during the Nez Perce War to be attributed to Chief Joseph (Graffe 1999 65). Some object histories may have been embellished through time in order to increase the historical or monetary value of a piece, and as Barbara Hall notes (Hall 1980: 131), "one must be cautious regarding collection information such as 'Found on the Battlefield of Wounded Knee' (cat. 98) unless specific information on the collector support it. The number of war shirts attributed to Red Cloud and the number of pipes attributed to Sitting Bull rival the number of beds slept in by George Washington." Regardless of the veracity of the attribution, the historical association with Chief Joseph or his band continues to be used to describe the objects, and gives them additional value and meaning.

More recently, the dress and twined fiber bag have had new experiences and interactions within the museum, when not living in their storage cabinets within collections spaces. Curator

of Archaeology Steve Lekson sent a letter to the Nez Perce in 2008 informing them that the CU Museum had objects with contexts associated with the Nez Perce War (Lekson 2008a). Although he received no response from the tribe, a future response from Nez Perce tribal members would open the door to recuperating additional meaning about the object, if not creating an opportunity for meaningful connections between its originating community and the object. In 2012, Curator of Cultural Anthropology Jennifer Shannon used the dress in a tour and presentation to Board Members of the University. She selected the dress and its associated bag because of its rich historical association, solid provenance information, and the potential it had to tell a larger story within United States history and the history of relationships with tribes (email to author, April 3, 2012).

### Conclusion

As war booty, this pair of items represents a specific category of exchange, operating within a particular paradigm in the history of the interactions between the United States and Native people. When George Miller Sternberg collected the artifacts from caches in the aftermath of the Clearwater Creek Battle, he was participating in a common practice for United States military personnel at that time. Looting caches and collecting from battlefields took place at the peak of colonialism and Manifest Destiny in the United States, and operated within the paradigm of salvage ethnography. The historical association and provenience of the Nez Perce War objects, and the rich stories it has to offer reflects the renewed focus of approaching material culture with a critical eye toward the ethics surrounding transactions and collecting practices that brought objects into museums.

## CHAPTER 5

### A Ramos Polychrome Jar

#### Introduction: Issues of Fakes in Museums

“A special kind of problem to be contended with in all museums is that of recognizing fake or fraudulent objects,” said Gordon Ekholm, Curator of Mexican Archaeology at the American Museum of Natural History (Ekholm 1964: 19). Nearly five decades later, this sentiment still rings true—fraudulent and replica objects are still produced and distributed, old fakes continue to circulate, and collectors and institutions continue their work in determining authenticity and exposing forgery. Replicas and fraudulent pieces can be found in many museum collections and are representative or illustrative of a variety of different mediums, regions, and time periods; and not limited to specific classes, types, or ages of objects (Ekholm 1964; Martin 2006; Paztory 2002; Savage 1963). When an object is discovered to be inauthentic or incorrectly attributed either from within a museum’s collection or after a recent purchase or acquisition, the realization is often followed by embarrassment or public controversy (Hall-Duncan: 2007; Sutton 2007). In other cases, the discovery of a replica piece meets with much less public scrutiny and the object is removed from exhibition, transferred to a teaching or research collection, or use as a learning tool on display (Ekholm 1964: 20). Some objects have yet to be identified as inauthentic or incorrectly attributed, and rest peacefully on their shelves in the storerooms of museums, piquing the attention of museum staff as troublesome but not enough so to merit significant investigation as to their authenticity.

The CU Museum has several pieces that have aroused this unsettled feeling in museum staff, many of which retain their original attributions and have yet to be re-examined to

determine their status as authentic, replica, or original art. However, one object, UCM 28847 (Figure 19. Replica Jar) is clearly identified as a replica (Figure 20. Replica Jar tag.)Figure 20. Replica Jar tag., and sits in a cabinet right next to authentic archaeological pieces.



**Figure 19. Replica Jar**

Replica Casas Grandes, no date given. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 28847.



**Figure 20. Replica Jar tag.**

Replica Casas Grandes, no date given. Close-up of tag identifying the jar as an imitation. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 28847.

This chapter focuses on the replica jar, UCM 28847, but also seeks to trace possible origins and trajectories for these types of objects, and to act as a guide for investigating and illustrating techniques of authentication and attribution. Although there is current debate about the definitions, constructions, and boundaries of the concepts of authentic and fake (Grasset 1998; Pasztory 2002; Shiner 1994), the type of authentication to which I referred is that practice which seeks to establish whether an object is the work of a particular place, period, region, or period; or associated with a specific context or event to which it has been attributed (Martin 2007: 141). Additionally, I used the word fake or forgery for “a work that, by mimicking the style of an artist...constitutes a deliberate attempt to deceive” (Hall-Duncan 2007: 28). I focused on ceramics from the Pre-Columbian Casas Grandes culture, because they occupy a peculiar place in the continuum between authentic, forgery, original, replica, and original art and provide a unique opportunity for examining the issues of fakes in museums.

The authenticity of Casas Grandes ceramics has been subject to doubt as far back as the 1960s and 1970s, after Charles Di Peso's excavations at Paquimé in northern Chihuahua, Mexico, when subsequent demand for archaeological artifacts was higher than supply, and local inhabitants turned away from pot-hunting and began to experiment with replicas and forgeries (Hills 2012: 110; Paddock 2012: 249; Stover 2012: 160). The village of Mata Ortiz near Paquimé is the best-known example of the rippling effect of looting and forging that ensued after the excavations. What began as several residents working out the techniques to produce adequate copies for sale to American tourists as authentic antiquities exploded into a contemporary ceramic revival movement, coalescing around former replica-producer Juan Quezada and continuing today. The contemporary style is varied and innovative, and arose from the inspiration of prehistoric Casas Grandes designs, but Juan Quezada began his career by carefully recreating Casas Grandes pottery to sell as authentic works in the United States (Andrews 2012: 181; Hills 2012: 113; MacCallum 1994: 5). These recreations produced by Quezada and other Mata Ortiz residents do not represent outright copies of original ceramics. Instead, they mimic the style and subject matter of authentic pieces, "creating a composition from an amalgam of motifs, passages, and techniques reminiscent or evocative of originals" (Sutton 2007: 16).

Given the sheer volume and quality of authentic and replica Casas Grandes pieces coming out of northern Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s, it seems likely that there are still many replica pieces in public and private collections, and these are still judged to be authentic Casas Grandes ceramics. Some of these works which wound their way into auction houses, museums, and private collections as authentic Casas Grandes antiquities are now coming to light as Casas Grandes replicas, and being attributed to late 1960s and early 1970s. Although these pieces are technically replicas, wording is carefully chosen so that many are hailed as early works of the

Mata Ortiz revival movement, and they gain significant status especially when they are attributed to Juan Quezada himself (Figure 21. Replica Effigy Jar) (Guarino 2012).



**Figure 21. Replica Effigy Jar**

Juan Quezada, 1960s. This pot was probably passed off as a fake before a purchaser took the bowl to Quezada's who claimed it as his own and signed the piece in 1996. Quezada's signature, its early creation date, and a photograph of the artist with the pot added significantly to the commercial value of the piece when it was sold at auction. Desert West Auction Service, Desert West Auction December 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Lot 2134.

The designation of replicas as early Mata Ortiz revival pieces illustrates the point that “a work may not be inauthentic in terms of its authorship and period, but it may be an original artwork or copy by another (generally later) artist...” (Hackforth-Jones and Aldrich 2012: 10). Attributing replica or inauthentic pieces of Casas Grandes pottery to the early Mata Ortiz movement allows museums to distinguish between the authentic and the original without acknowledging the presence of a forgery.

## Object Properties

Although there may be other Casas Grandes ceramics in the museum's collections that are in fact replicas and have yet to be recognized as such, I chose jar UCM 28847 (Figure 19. Replica Jar and Figure 20. Replica Jar tag. to illustrate replica Casas Grandes pottery. Object UCM 28847 is a Ramos Polychrome snake effigy jar, created with the black and red painted style and motifs of authentic Casas Grandes jars. The snake is three-dimensional and coils around the diameter of the jar upward, with its head resting on the shoulder of the vessel. The painted design on the snake is in two rows of alternating red and black triangles, stacked to face each other so that their peaks touch, which forms a diamond from the negative space of the unpainted buff slip (Figure 22. Replica Jar). The buff diamonds are decorated by a single, central black dot. The head of the serpent also features these black dots, which are organized into a T-shaped pattern and separate the two eyes (Figure 25. Jar). The design on the body of the vessel is a coiled motif of interlocking buff-colored scrolls, bordered by areas in black and red paint.



**Figure 22. Replica Jar**

Replica Casas Grandes, no date given. Shows detail of serpent's head and interlocking scroll designs. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 28847.

In 1978, John Rohner donated two ceramic jars—including UCM 28847—to the CU Museum, both of which he identified as modern copies of Casas Grandes archaeological ceramics (Huss 1979). Rohner purchased the jars along with 50 other ceramic pieces in 1977 from dealer Ralph Belich of Omaha, Nebraska, who thought that they were authentic Casas Grandes ceramics (Huss 1979). Rohner knew when he purchased the 50 ceramic pieces that they were replicas and not authentic Casas Grandes antiquities, and told the museum so when he donated them. Although UCM 28847 is undeniably a replica and was created in the 1960s or early 1970s, it is not completely certain whether the piece is part of the revival movement created by Juan Quezada in Mata Ortiz, or if it was created within the wider tradition of replicating Casas Grandes pottery for sale. The collection data associated with the jar presents

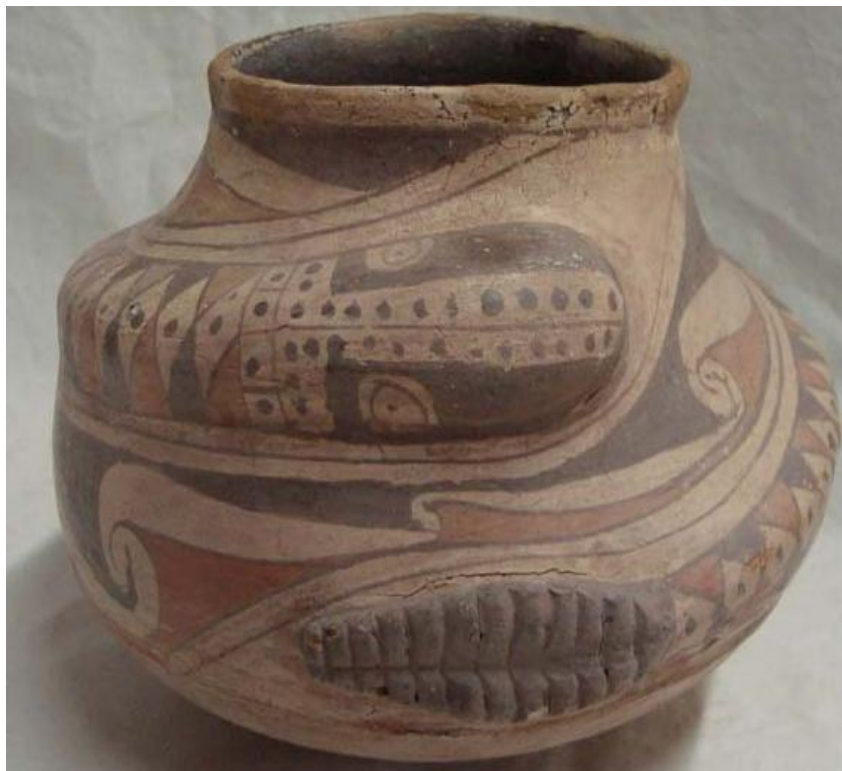
conflicting information, and attests to the possibility of documentation and transcription errors in museum files. The accession worksheet identifies UCM 28847 as “possibly related to Juan Quezada’s tradition” (UCMNH 1978), but the catalogue card states that the two pots in the donation “do not appear to be directly related with the Juan Quezada tradition” (Huss 1979). Although the accession worksheet is older than the catalogue card, without the facts and reasoning behind the attribution or denial of attribution to Juan Quezada and the Mata Ortiz pottery movement, the association of UCM 28847 to Quezada’s pottery style is uncertain.

Physically UCM 28847 exhibits the typical characteristics of Casas Grandes pottery, including a polished surface, red and black paint, geometric shapes, scrolls, and a serpent motif (Powell 2006: 37). It is similar to other authentic Casas Grandes pieces with raised coiling serpents, such as (Figure 23. **Jar**) from the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology.



**Figure 23. Jar**  
Casas Grandes, 1200-1450. Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, 65.24.76.

UCM 28847 is nearly identical to another replica snake effigy pot (Figure 24. Replica Jar), which was sold at auction.



**Figure 24. Replica Jar**

Casas Grandes, 1960s. Desert West Auction Service, Desert West Auction March 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, and April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, Lot 2206.

The main difference between Figure 24. Replica Jar, and UCM 28847 (Figure 19. Replica Jar and Figure 22. Replica Jar) is the tail of the coiled serpent—UCM 28847 lacks the rattle tail in comparison to Figure 24. Replica Jar. Except for this minor difference, the pattern, motifs, and execution are extremely similar between the two vessels, including the diamond and triangle pattern on the snake and the interlocking scroll pattern on the body of the vessel. I can only speculate as to reasons for the extreme similarities between the two vessels; they may have been made by the same artist, or by different artists based off of a shared template. Regardless, these two both illustrate the types of replicas that were produced in Northern Chihuahua after Di

Peso's excavations in the 1960s and into the early days of the Mata Ortiz pottery movement in the 1970s. However, to better understand how snake effigy jar UCM 28847 fits into the Casas Grandes culture and possible circumstances of their life histories, it is necessary to investigate the history of archaeology related to the Casas Grandes culture, as well as the related histories of the Southwestern art market, art trafficking, and the manufacture of forgeries.

### 'Before' of Collecting: Archaeology and Forgeries

The trajectory and effects of the Di Peso excavations on spurring an industry of first looting and then forging is a common byproduct of archaeology and the aesthetic preferences of museums and collectors. In fact, even in Mesoamerica faking pottery dates back to the early 1800s, if not further. For example, W.H. Holmes, writing for *Science* in 1886 describes the practice of faking pottery in Mexico, and cites the creation of railroads as contributing to the "renewed impetus to the fraudulent practice of faking pottery" (Holmes 1886: 170). In the case of pre-Columbian objects, high prices at auction houses and the active interest of private collectors in their acquisition and display increases their commercial value. This fosters illicit trafficking in authentic antiquities, as well as emergence of fakes and a faking industry (Ekholm 1964: 19; Hall-Duncan 2007: 29), because genuine artifacts are a finite resource, and their supply is never sufficient to meet demand (Grasset 1998: 265). As Holmes perceptively states in 1886:

...wide-spread fancy for hunting and hoarding relics has given rise to minor features greatly to be deplored. The increased demand has given a considerable money value to antiques; and this has led to many attempts, on the part of dishonest persons, to supply the market by fraudulent means (Holmes 1886: 170).

Money is the main reason most fakes continue to be made, and since there has always been money to be made in art, forgers have been quick to capitalize on this in areas where demand exceeded supply (Hall-Duncan 2007: 29). Strict legal penalties also help to encourage faking and

discourage illicit trafficking of antiquities. As the commercial value of authentic pieces rises, the producers of fakes are encouraged to refine their production and technique in order to resist detection. This causes experts to have difficulty determining authenticity because forgers go to great lengths to perfect their techniques. For example, forgers prepare their pieces for the market using a variety of tricks to age their wares, such as burying them or washing and partially removing a slip of thin clay (Holmes 1886: 170). As much as authentication techniques have advanced with the use of chemical and compositional analysis and direct-dating methods, so too have the techniques of fakery improved by leaps and bounds, creating a constant pull between the limits of science and technology and the creative ingenuity of forgers.

#### Casas Grandes: a Pre-Columbian Culture

The Casas Grandes culture flourished in northern Chihuahua, Mexico, during what is known as the Medio Period, between 1200 and 1450 AD (Whalen and Minnis 2012: 403). The site of Paquimé was the center of Casas Grandes culture in this period, and contained elements of both Pueblo and Mesoamerican style, architecture, and material culture (Powell 2008: 34). The center produced a distinctive type of painted pottery called Ramos Polychrome that is categorized into a larger ceramic type known as Salado Polychrome. Ramos Polychrome has been called “the calling card of Casas Grandes” (Lekson 2008b: 211), it represents “the hallmark type and the primary focus for Casas Grandes stylistic complexity” (Moulard 2005: 78), and is thus found most predominantly in the Medio Period. The bodies of the polychrome wares are buff, light biscuit, tan, or ivory colored, onto which elaborate zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs have been painted in red and black (Whalen and Minnis 2012: 204). Red paint can be used for fine framing lines (Figure 25. Jar), but is most often utilized to in-fill solids outlined with fine black lines (Figure 26. Jar) (Philips 2010). After 1450, the distinctive Ramos

Polychrome style faded out within the larger abandonment of Paquimé as a cultural center and a regional abandonment of the Medio Period way of life (Powell 2008: 37).



**Figure 25. Jar**

Casas Grandes. 1300-1450. Obtained by the museum in 1923.  
University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 2061a.



**Figure 26. Jar**  
Casas Grandes. 1300-1450. Acquired by the museum in 1956.  
University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 9361.

### Pre-Columbian Archaeology and Forgeries

Located in northern Chihuahua less than 100 miles from the United States border, Mata Ortiz is a small village nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Madre at about 5,200 feet elevation (Paddock 2012: 249). The great ancient city of Paquimé is located no more than 20 miles from the present-day village of Mata Ortiz, and both sites were set on the course for world-renown beginning with a single archaeological expedition. In 1958, the Amerind Foundation of Dragoon, Arizona and the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) funded an archaeological expedition at Paquimé, led by American archaeologist Charles Di Peso (Goelbel 2012: 210; Paddock 2012: 261). The findings were published by Di Peso in 1974, in a series of eight volumes (Di Peso 1974; Di Peso et. al. 1974). Di Peso's excavation and findings stimulated

interest in pottery, and this interest also sparked illegal trading and the marketing of antiquities outward from the Casas Grandes region (Goelbel 2012: 210). By the time the joint archaeological expedition ended, pothunting had exploded throughout the region, and a resulted in a steady demand for prehistoric pottery throughout the Casas Grandes Valley with pothunters destroying sites at a high rate (Hills 2012: 90). In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, at a time when the pots were more plentiful, many Mata Ortiz residents dug prehistoric pots for sale to tourists (Stover 2012: 160). It was easy for local Casas Grandes Valley residents to walk into the hills and dig for artifacts of their own, without ever stepping foot on the site of Paquimé itself, and then to sell their finds to local merchants, wealthier area residents, Mexican traders, and American buyers.

After about a decade of lucrative pothunting, this rapidly expanding market was curtailed on two fronts, firstly that prehistoric pots and artifacts were a diminishing finite resource and were becoming more difficult to find, and secondly due to a series of important pieces of legislation. When supplies of prehistoric artifacts and pottery began to run low in northern Chihuahua in the later 1960s, new pottery that was purposefully made to look old began showing up on the market (Stover 2012: 160). In 1970, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted a convention intended to prohibit and prevent the illicit trade of antiquities worldwide. In 1972 Mexico enacted Federal Law on Archaeological, Artistic and Historic Monuments and Zones, declaring all pre-Columbian artifacts to be national property and necessitating permits for their possession, sale, transfer, or export (Hills 2012: 91). Although this made any prehistoric or prehistoric-looking pottery unlawful to have, the diminishing quantities of authentic pots and the ease with which new pots could be quickly and cheaply produced and antiqued encouraged growth for this new facet of the local economy.

Mata Ortiz and Juan Quezada

Inspired by the pre-Columbian artifacts from the nearby ruins of Paquimé and the finds closer to their village, many families in the village of Mata Ortiz became expert potters, making replicas of archaeological discoveries which they then sold as authentic artifacts (Paddock 2012: 249). Some of the earliest potters experimented with the production of replica wares soon after the Di Peso excavations concluded in 1961 (Hills 2012: 110). Working individually and as a group, a handful of men experimented to perfect their techniques for replicating and antiquing new pottery in order to market it as authentic Casas Grandes. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, these men worked to perfect their pottery wares, which were sold to traders near the border, eventually making their way into the hands of American tourists and collectors (Andrews 2012: 181).

Juan Quezada was among this group of men and began making pottery in the early 1960s, working with them to perfect painting, firing, and aging techniques in the replication of Casas Grandes pottery. Born in 1940, as young man Quezada encountered numerous sherds, sites, and artifacts of the Casas Grandes people, and was always inspired by the intricate designs (Andrews 2012: 178). Although by the time Juan began to create his own replicas in the early 1960s many techniques were known and available for aging the pots, the potters still had not discovered a successful method for making black and red paints (Hills 2012: 113; MacCallum 1994: 5). Quezada and his fellow potters conducted many experiments to perfect the pottery tradition. He studied ancient sherds, vessels, and artifacts to better develop his own techniques, including the addition of temper, the use of rounded molds for creating vessel bases, and the process of preparing clay (Lowell et. al. 1999: 8). In the mid to late 1960s, Juan Quezada began to craft and produce pottery that could pass as authentic Casas Grandes wares (Figure 27).



**Figure 27. Effigy Vessel.**

Attributed to Juan Quezada, 1970-1975. JMB Galleries, Inc.  
NA0002

He had developed paint production methods, which he kept as a closely guarded secret to improve his economic viability (Hills 2012: 114). By the late 1960s several buyers were purchasing and commissioning Quezada's work on a regular basis (Hills 2012: 130; MacCallum 1994: 7). When pottery became an economically viable means for him to support his immediate family, other relatives became interested in the process and asked for instruction (Parks 1993: iv). Quezada carefully instructed them in each step of the process, sparking the beginning of a pottery movement that would permeate the village.

In 1976, an anthropologist named Spencer Heath MacCallum discovered several replica Casas Grandes pieces in a Deming, New Mexico antique store, which sparked a journey to find the source (Lowell et. al. 1999: 9; Parks 1993: 1-3). Eventually MacCallum tracked Juan

Quezada down as their maker (Lowell et. al. 1999: 9; Parks 1993: 1-3). Returning several times, MacCallum offered Quezada a monthly stipend on his third trip with no strings attached so that Quezada could work and experiment with complete freedom (MacCallum 1994: 8; Parks 1993: 15). Although there were at least a dozen potters working when Spencer MacCallum arrived in Mata Ortiz in 1976, his monthly stipend provided Quezada with an enormous advantage. In addition to coaching, positive reinforcement, and economic security, MacCallum educated Quezada through his selective buying patterns and his excitement over certain shapes and designs (Hills 2012: 138). Between 1976 and 1983, he marketed and sold Juans Quezada's pieces as contemporary revivals to as many curators, museums, galleries, and collectors, and promoted Mata Ortiz pottery as an original art movement and not archaeological reproductions (Lowell et. al. 1999: 9; Parks 1993: 15). After this promotion, there was no shortage of buyers, inquiries and orders, and requests for exhibitions and demonstrations (MacCallum 1994: 10).

In the early 1980s, more and more American buyers began to show up and pay United States currency due to MacCallum's spectacular promoting efforts with exhibitions, touring, and publications (Hills 2012: 124). The number of potters in Mata Ortiz rose significantly at this time, probably due to the increased demand from tourists, traders, and merchants. In the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, there was a florescence of younger potters in the village, and to this day Quezada's students and the students of other potters can be found in nearly every house in Mata Ortiz (Andrews 2012: 182; Lowell et. al. 1999: 10). The styles of contemporary potters in Mata Ortiz vary as students and followers continue to experiment and innovate on their own, but overall the work reflects Quezada's original interpretation of ancient Casas Grandes pottery (Andrews 2012: 182; MacCallum 1994: 83). The village of Mata Ortiz has become a tourist attraction in and of itself, with new generations of potters learning pottery and inventing

their own distinctive palettes and designs independent of the prehistoric style and master potter Juan Quezada.

MacCallum's early efforts as patron and promoter were successful when Mata Ortiz pottery was recognized in the United States as an authentic contemporary art movement akin the turn-of-the-century revival movements of Nampeyo and Maria Martinez in the parallel history of Southwest art patronage. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an influx of people, ideas, and technology swept into the American Southwest as Western civilization advanced upon the landscape. In the late 1800s, the Santa Fe Railway widened trade networks and set the stage for an explosion of tourism in the area. Quick-thinking entrepreneurs promoted a romanticized regional identity of the Southwest for incoming tourists, focusing their strategies on Pueblos and indigenous peoples for claims as tourist attractions (Tisdale 1996: 435; Weigle 1989: 115). As Pueblos loomed larger in appeal of the American Southwest, they became a major economic base of the Pueblo region (Dauber 1990: 579).

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wealthy white patrons and preservationists flooded the region and worked with and founded organizations such as the Pueblo Pottery Fund, Indian Arts Fund (IAF), School for Advanced Research (SAR), Santa Fe Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico, New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs (NMAIA), and Southwestern Association of Indian Arts. They promoted and marketed traditional pottery designs and techniques by sponsoring regional and national demonstrations at expositions and fairs, engaging in campaigns to resurrect quality and workmanship of wares, and working to legitimate and authenticate Pueblo potters as artists (Batkin 1987: 32; Dauber 1990: 577; Jacobs 1998: 189; Tisdale 2005: 59). By the 1930s, the work of patrons had paid off and Pueblo artists realized the economic advantage of producing pieces of high workmanship and with strict adherence to local

designs and materials (Mullin 1992: 408). As an example of the work of Anglo-American preservationists and patrons, Nampeyo and Maria Martinez became the most well-known potters, and a number of Pueblo potters from their Pueblos also rose to fame. Their pottery revival and economic success inspired other potters of the Pueblo and had a strong influence on the legacy of the revival.

From the beginning, Spencer MacCallum wisely recognized that the Southwest Indian market was the obvious place to begin his marketing campaign (Gilbert 2000: 18). There are several reasons for this choice, beginning with the fact that the manufacture and style of Mata Ortiz pottery would probably appeal to those whose tastes followed the Southwest Indian pottery art market. As a region, the Southwest contained the greatest and nearest concentration of people who bought art of similar style and design to that of Mata Ortiz, and the area had a well-established history of placing a high aesthetic and monetary value on Pueblo pottery. Pursuing the Southwest Indian market would also give MacCallum an advantage because aligning Mata Ortiz works with Pueblo art bolstered his claims of Mata Ortiz pottery as art, not craft. MacCallum's incipient promotional efforts continually targeted the Southwest market, and emphasized the necessity of recognizing Mata Ortiz not as craft or reproduction, but as a fine art movement (Stover 2012: 162). Elevating this pottery over the craft level avoided the association with Mexican crafts, a categorization that would have condemned Mata Ortiz to a low-priced market (Gilbert 2000: 18). Through coincidence, followed by astute patronage and promotion, Mata Ortiz pottery followed a unique trajectory moving from forgeries of Casas Grandes wares, to the creation of a unique style, and finally to the recognition of an entire revival movement that continues to flourish.

Museums, collectors, merchants, and galleries all actively seek the contemporary ceramics of Mata Ortiz that arose within the revival movement which parallels and has been absorbed into the Southwestern Indian art market (Gilbert 2000: 18). Like the Pueblo revival pottery of Maria Martinez, Nampeyo, and their descendants, there is a large market for Mata Ortiz pottery. As noted before, many archaeological objects are often subject to forgery, and circulate and dupe collectors and museums alike. Like Juan Quezada's early works, some replicas are so well-executed that they easily pass for authentic and many museums and collectors lack the expertise of a ceramic specialist to inform their collecting practices. Authenticating a piece requires careful analysis and attention to detail, and involves acquiring knowledge about the physical conditions of objects.

As a type of object-centered research that collates the many contexts, experiences, and marks of an object, the life history approach provides a useful framework for the investigating authenticity. The long-established way of validating and assessing the authenticity of an object is through connoisseurship, an analytic process in which a person with a critical understanding of a subject aims to offer attribution to the provenance and career of a piece (Hackforth-Jones and Aldrich 2012: 9; Sutton 2007: 17). The authenticity of a piece can be determined at any step of the examination and analysis process, however, investigations of age and attribution should use not one test but a broad and systematic approach (Martin 2007: 147). Determining authenticity requires more than visual, comparative, and documentary analysis, and should involve a body of expert opinions and consensus from a majority of specialists (Hackforth-Jones and Aldrich 2012: 12).

As with other object-centered examinations, analysis begins with a visual inspection of the piece to note its physical form, stylistic elements, and design materials. Visual inspection of

an object can yield clues about culture, age, materials, use, and geographic region that provide useful leads for comparative analysis with other objects (Grasset 1998: 270). This is especially relevant for objects that have missing, incomplete, or doubtful proveniences or life histories. When investigating ceramics, “‘documentary’ objects are wares that can be traced through their provenance to their original source, and, usually, their date of production.” (Wesley 2012: 40). For archaeological ceramics, documentary objects are those which can at the very least be traced to a specific, authorized excavation, and at best carefully recorded locality and provenience information.

Visual analysis may extend beyond magnification and comparative analysis to include microscopic examination, ultraviolet fluorescence, and medical imaging technologies such as X-ray and CAT scans (Martin 2007: 141). These material and visual analysis techniques are often non-destructive. Some clues about the age and attribution of a piece are also found in the microstructure of the materials and can only be analyzed using light and electron microscopes (Martin 2007: 142). Composition analysis determines the identity and amount of elements or compounds present in a given sample, and the analysis requires a minimal amount of destructive analysis (Wesley 2013: 43). Determining the actual age of an object requires specific methods of tracking the material changes over time of a specific feature of the object. Thermoluminescence (TL) dating is used for fired ceramics, and determines an age range by measuring the luminescence (light emitted) as a sample of the piece is heated under controlled conditions to release free electrons that have accumulated in the clay’s chemical structure since it was fired (Martin 2007: 146). All of these tests on the physical object should be not be taken individually as proof of authenticity, but rather used as multiple lines of supporting evidence in conjunction with documentation and outside research.

The archival documentation that is associated with a particular object has the potential to reveal significant information about attribution, provenience, and age. This also includes the inferences or leads that these archival sources may suggest. For example, take UCM 28847, which was knowingly accessioned by the museum as a Casas Grandes replica. If donor John Rohner had not known that the jar was an imitation when it he donated it, UCM 28847 would have been accessioned into the museum as an authentic archaeological ceramic with little provenience history or data. However, even if this were the case, without even looking at the piece or having the knowledge that it is indeed a replica the associated documentation raises suspicions about its authenticity for two main reasons. The UNESCO Convention of 1970 and the 1972 Federal Law on Archaeological, Artistic and Historic Monuments and Zones enacted by Mexico were both meant to curtail and inhibit illicit antiquities possession, sale, transfer, or export (Hills 2012: 91). As a result, the market for pre-Columbian reproductions expanded. If it cannot be proven that the piece was in the United States prior to the 1970 convention and 1972 legislation, there is good reason to question whether it was either obtained illicitly or was created as a replica. The same conclusion can be reached by the fact that the piece has no association with a known archaeological excavation. Pieces acquired soon after Di Peso's 1958-1961 excavations may have been looted from sites or created as replicas. Given that the piece in this example could potentially be part of illegal trafficking or a reproduction activities necessitates the use of other analytical methods to make a more definitive attribution.

### Conclusion

This specific type of fake has an interesting trajectory: it was considered real, then realized as replica, and now is part of a contemporary art movement. Based on this trajectory, it is have become important for museums with Casas Grandes collections to designate their pieces

based on their relation either to the archaeological culture of Casas Grandes or to the contemporary tradition of Juan Quezada and the Mata Ortiz ceramic movement. These types of ceramics can be classified in museums on a wide spectrum between original, authentic, and inauthentic, and in all cases wording is crucial and must be carefully used to avoid misidentifying, diminishing or denigrating the work of Mata Ortiz, ancient Casas Grandes, or replication artists. Casas Grandes replicas or forgeries are just one type of inauthentic object that comes into a museum collection, but the peculiar circumstances regarding their shifting meaning, interactions, and contexts makes them a useful example for outlining how reproductions are collected and acquired by museums, and what steps can be taken in the identification and investigation of possible forgeries and objects of dubious origin.

## CHAPTER 6

## A Man's Military Style Jacket – UCM 25132

## Introduction

Object UCM 25132 (Figure 28) is tailored in the style of a European men's military jacket or waistcoat with brass buttons for closure and also faux pockets and a decorative tail piece.



**Figure 28. Jacket**

Navajo. 1800-1850. Obverse of jacket. The button and pocket style as well as the decorative pockets of this jacket recall contemporary military uniforms, which the beaded panels and buckskin fringe are distinctly a Plains style. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 25132.

Red and navy trade cloth was utilized to create the jacket, and four beaded panels with designs of simple banding in white and blue beads adorn the shoulders and sleeves. This jacket is a representative example of the class of ethnographic museum objects which combine European styles and trade goods with Native designs and aesthetics to produce a hybrid piece. It is also representative of the problems of documenting early ethnographic hybrid items, due to wide intertribal trade and the lack of distinctive regional characteristics and design motifs. This chapter is the life history of such a hybrid object, and it attempts to trace the biography of a shirt from its origins as a man's piece of clothing to its life in the museum, where several decades of careful study and analysis have done little to clear up its original identity and use, and it remains a source of intrigue and mystery. The minimal documentation history available for the jacket, the use of common trade items, and the simple design motifs work to complicate attribution, identification, and date of manufacture or use. It stands out as a unique piece in itself, but has no attributes of design or manufacture that allow for a confident tribal affiliation due to the mixture of several different styles.

The jacket was donated by former Curator Joe Ben Wheat, whose life work included the creation of a chronological framework of Southwestern textiles and weaving, and included this piece in his study. According to Wheat's careful examination of the jacket and its associated history, UCM 25132 is a men's ceremonial shirt which was worn by Navajo men sometime between 1850 and 1973—when Joe Ben Wheat purchased it—and created before 1850

(UCMNH 1985). Four decades after it became a part of the University Museum's collection, the jacket continues to accrue new and changing meaning within the museum. The hybrid manufacture and lack of identifiable tribal design, in combination with its extensive history of study within the museum, make the life history approach a useful one for better understanding the jacket, because it works to gather all the possible contexts of origin and use together.

Although the jacket has been the focus of several lengthy examinations (Ashton 1974; Reading 2012; UCMNH 2011; Wheat n.d.; Wheat 2003), and much literature has been recorded after it came into the museum (Frank and Holbrook 1990; Hedlund 1990; Moore 2003; Wheat 2003), it has little documentation related to its earlier life history. My research on this jacket began with the object and its catalogue card, and expanded to include archival records in the museum, research and analyses conducted on the piece, tribal consultation notes, outside research, and comparative examples. Previous documentation and analyses has referred the UCM 25132 as a shirt, a jacket, or a shirt-jacket. In this chapter, I alternated between the usage of all three, as well as waistcoat. Similarly the name to describe the generic wool cloth found in this jacket is invariably called trade cloth, List cloth, or Stroud cloth.

### Object Properties



**Figure 29. Jacket**

Navajo, 1800-1850. Reverse of jacket. Notice the decorative tail flap, row of floating rectangles in the beadwork pattern of the right-hand shoulder panel, and uneven bottom edge showing the repair. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 25132.

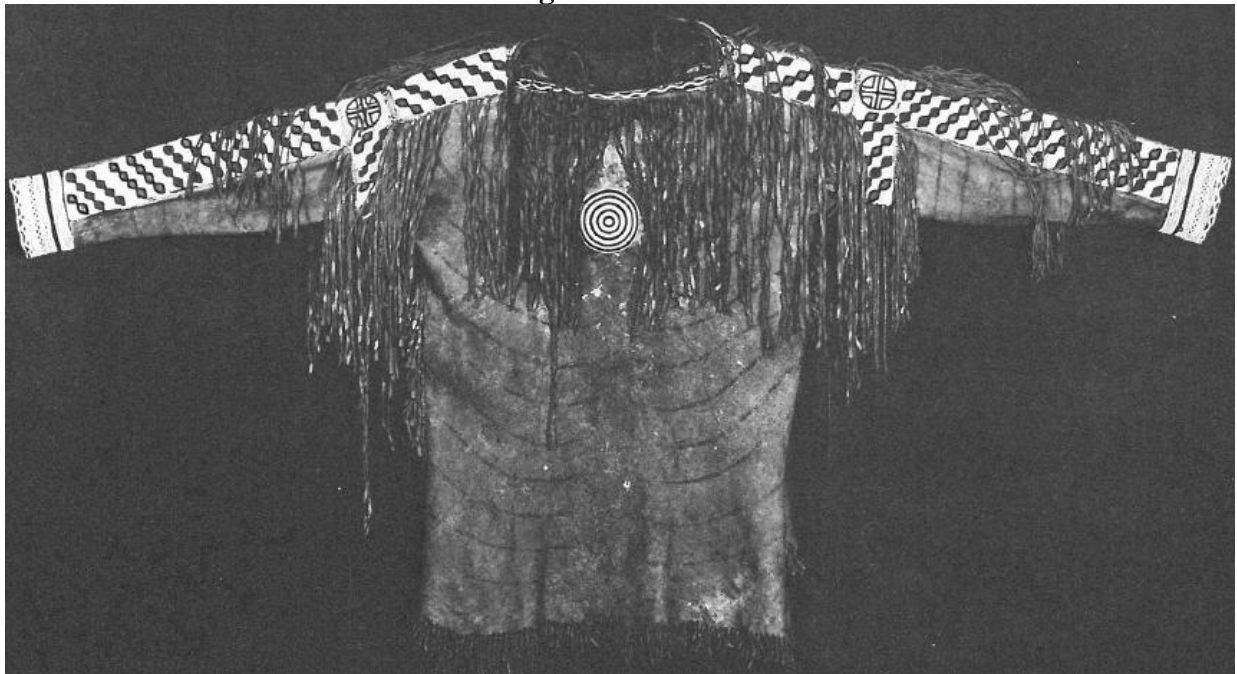
The cut and style of the jacket is in a military fashion with one side made from navy trade cloth and the other side made from red trade cloth (Figure 28 and Figure 29) (Reading 2012: 1; UCMNH 1985). The proper left side and sleeve of the jacket is blue, and the proper right is red. The back of the jacket is also half red and half blue down the center. The bottom edge of the jacket shows the white selvedge leftover from the dye process. On the front on the jacket on either side in the position of pockets are faux, decorative trapezoidal flaps of trade cloth with the white selvedge along the bottom. Both flaps are ornamented with flat brass buttons in their upper corners. The flap is of red List cloth on the wearer's left side and of navy List cloth on the wearer's right side of the jacket. A placket of ten brass buttons mounted with sinew onto a

narrow strip of navy List cloth with selvedge at the bottom extends from neck to the waist of the jacket (Wheat n.d.). The bottom button is a “composite domed button with brass front crimped onto a white metal back and a brass shank (loop) which passes through the back” (Wheat n.d.). Button holes are simply-cut through a symmetrical facing of red List cloth, and also through the navy blue List cloth of the wearer’s left side of the jacket onto which the red facing is sewn. In the center of the back of the jacket is a square of red trade cloth surmounted by smaller trapezoidal flap of navy trade cloth with the white selvedge along the bottom. The blue flap is ornamented at the upper corners with flat brass commercial buttons (Wheat n.d.)

“Epaulettes” and sleeve panels of opaque blue and white pony beads on buckskin decorate each sleeve and the shoulders, and are accented by a narrow untanned hide fringe (Reading 2012: 1; UCMNH1985; Wheat n.d.). The epaulettes almost completely encircle the upper part of the sleeve, and they cover the seam of the jacket where the arm attaches to the body. The sleeve panels are sewn so that they would be visible and sit on top of the wearer’s arms. According to Barbara Hall in her description of a Plains Cree shirt (Figure 30 and Figure 31) with similar design motifs and style to the UCM jacket, “The placement of the sleeve bands is unusual in that they are sewn on top center of the sleeve instead of behind the fold as was customary in order to avoid splitting the quill or bead stitches” (Hall 1980: 71).



**Figure 30. Shirt**



**Figure 31. Shirt**

Plains Cree, 1860-1890. Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, 77-17.



**Figure 32. Epaulette and Beaded Panel**

Navajo, 1800-1850. Close-up of wearer's left arm, showing the lazy stitch and design pattern of the beaded panels. University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, 25132.

The design motif on the sleeve panels and epaulettes is sewn using the lane or lazy stitch in three columns or lanes to attach the beads with sinew to the hide (Figure 32). The overall design consists of alternating bands of varying thicknesses of blue and white beads. The design on the sleeve panels, beginning at the coat's sleeve openings and moving upward toward the shoulders are as follows: alternating bands of blue and white pony beads at a thickness of two bead rows on wearer's right sleeve and three bead rows on the wearer's left sleeve, extending for 10 bands on the right sleeve and 8 on the left sleeve. These alternating bands are followed by a block of blue beads, bordered on the top and bottom by a two-bead-row band of blue beads, a two-bead-row of

white beads, and a block of white beads. The alternative bands at the jacket's wrist repeat at the upper end of the beaded sleeve panel. The epaulette design consists of a central motif with small blue rectangles set into a white background stripe. Flanking the central rectangle design are several alternating small bands of blue and white beads at a thickness of two-bead-rows per band. The alternating bands are flanked by a solid block of white beads and then a solid block of blue beads. For both the sleeves and epaulettes, the panel of beads is attached to the blue List cloth by sinew and to the red List cloth with cotton thread (Wheat n.d.).

The jacket is in overall poor condition, with holes, losses, fraying, and staining throughout. The proper right side of the jacket has been previously repaired. Red diagonal twill was sewn over the brighter red trade cloth provided an extra layer of fabric to the jacket (UCMNH 1985). The newer layer is attached as an exterior overlay with black repair threads, presumably due to extensive damage to the original red List cloth (Reading 2012: 2). The newer fabric was also used to recreate half of the original collar. When the outer lining was attached to the red side of the jacket, the resulting alignment was slightly off (Reading 2012: 3). The bottom edges of the red and blue sides are mismatched, and the coat is no longer able to be buttoned in front.

### Manufacture and Materials

A brief examination of the history and characteristics of the materials and style of construction used on this jacket can provide clues about regional or tribal attribution, or confirm the present attribution of Navajo. The earliest beads introduced by Europeans were pony beads, so-called because they were carried in packs on the ponies of traders (NMAI 2008: 23). Pony beads spread in use and popularity in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were limited to a

handful of colors, including white, blue, red, and black. Trade with Europeans as well as between tribes and regions was widespread, with the result that tribal stylistic development did not immediately exist and ideas traveled across tribal and physical boundaries and landscapes. Simplicity of design is characteristic of early beaded designs before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c (Hall 1980: 85). Before the emergence of regional styles, early beaded designs were simple geometric shapes and patterns, and are similar across the Northern, Southern, Central, and Western Plains. After the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century inhabitants of each area developed preferences for bead styles and colors, as well as the way that they utilized them (Hall 1980: 51; Koeninger et. al. 1979: 16). On the Southern Plains, tribes such as the Kiowa, Comanche, Southern Cheyenne, Southern Arapahoe, and Kiowa Apache tended toward a style of beadwork utilizing geometric shapes on a white background (Hall 1980: 61). Tribes of the Southwest had designs similar to the generalized and relatively simple designs, using a white background in combination with isolated, repeated, and geographic design units (Hall 1980: 63). Additionally, as beadwork spread to tribes of the Southwest, it also developed to some extent among the Navajo until the late 1860s. The Navajo used blocky designs similar to Southern Plains and Apache tribes (Frank and Holbrook 1990: 5). A pair of men's leggings (Figure 33) dated to between 1830 and 1850 exemplifies these simple, block patterns (Penney 1990: 153).



**Figure 33. Man's leggings**

Upper Missouri region, Montana or North Dakota, 1830-1850. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, NA.202.440 A/B

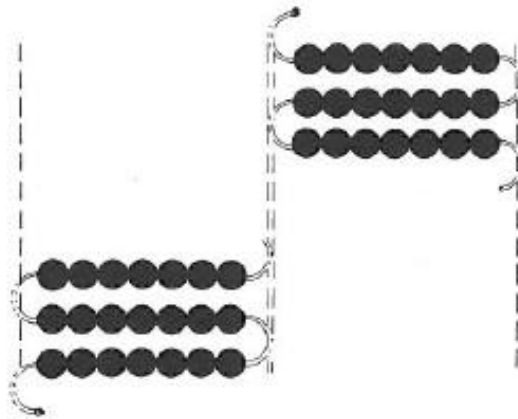
Two of the men pictured in Figure 34 have leggings or beaded panels similar to this as well.



**Figure 34. 1851 Arapaho and Cheyenne delegation to Washington, D.C.**

Note the beadwork patterning on the shirt of the left-hand man, as well as on the leggings of the rightmost man. Fort Laramie National Historic Site.

Common to all Plains tribes was the use of the lazy or lane stitch, which evolved from earlier quilled designs done in parallel rows (Figure 35) (Hall 1980: 54; Koeninger 1979: 16). The lazy stitch is used to sew a series of parallel row of strung beads and produces a geometric pattern (Koeninger et. al. 1979: 16). The beadworker draws parallel lanes on backing material, then strings enough beads to cross the space between the lines drawn and tacks the beads to the back with a tiny stitch at the edge of each lane. She continues back and forth between the lines, alternating each side until the lane is filled. (Conn 1986: 22).



**Figure 35. Lazy or lane stitch** (Conn 1986: 22)

The trade cloth used in the jacket was imported by Europeans from many sources for trade as whole pieces of dyed fabric, and dates as far back as the early 1800s (Jennys 2004: 52). The navy and original red cloth are trade cloths, commonly known as saved-list, Stroud, and List cloth, which are whole pieces of woolen cloth dyed in a certain way so that their edges are kept un-dyed and remain white (Reddick and Fenner 2004: 21). The white edges are called selvages or lists, hence the name List cloth. This process prevents wasting of dyes that were expensive, because the white edges or selvages would be cut off in the process of sewing seams on clothes (Reddick and Fenner 2004: 21). The white edges or selvages were the result of heavy canvas bindings that were sewn onto the edges of the fabric piece, remaining through the dyeing process, and removed afterwards (Reddick and Fenner 2004: 21). The term “Stroud cloth” refers to the wool-producing district around Stroud, England which was well known for producing great quantities of wool cloth with white selvages (Reddick and Fenner 2004: 21). Native Americans, especially Navajo weavers, would obtain large pieces of the trade cloth, using it either as it came or unweaving it to reweave or to respin it into yarn and fabric (Hedlund 1990: 96). Bayeta or baize is a generic term for several types of trade cloth that were used or rewoven

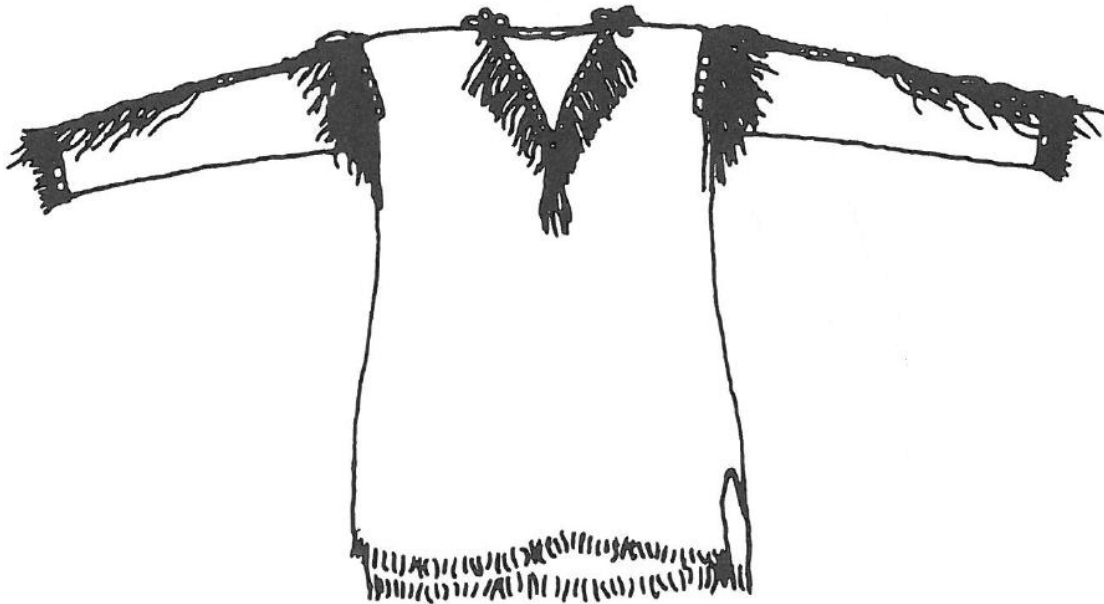
in 19<sup>th</sup> century textiles. Although bayeta is a Spanish word and baize is an English word, either term refers to dyed fabrics from Spain, England, Europe, Mexico, and the Near East (Hedlund 1990: 78). Common dyes used in trade cloths were cochineal, indigo and lac. Cochineal is a crimson red dye made from the dried and crushed bodies of insects from the Americas (Hedlund 1990: 78). Lac is a crimson red dye derived from the resinous secretions of the insect *Laccifer lacca* (Hedlund 1990: 82). Red Lac dye was the most common dye in southwestern weavings from the late 1700s to early 1860s, when it began to be replaced with cochineal dyes (Hedlund 1990: 24).

In its physical shape and attributes, the trade cloth jacket has characteristics similar to the best-known articles of Plains men's attire: the war shirt. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these shirts were most commonly made of buckskin or hide and worn by distinguished tribal members. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the war shirt became more common apparel for men, who wore them for a range of special occasions. Regional trends are loosely identifiable for men's shirts, but the individual preferences of each shirt maker, as well as the spread of ideas across the region are such that no shirt fits perfectly into a specific region. Panels of beadwork or quillwork, which figure largely into these shirts, were possibly intended to cover up seams, and later modified to imitate the epaulettes of British and French military uniforms (Hall 1980: 68). Wide, beaded strips on the shoulders and sleeves of men's shirts are commonly associated with Southern, Central, and Northern Plains style (Figure 36 and Figure 37)



**Figure 36. Sewn-closed skin shirt**

Northern Plains. Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, 57-353a.



**Figure 37. Sewn-closed skin shirt**

Southern Plains. Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, 73-28.

Shirts in the northern part of the Plains in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were constructed with tailored sleeves and closed sides, similar to the skilled tailoring of Subarctic tribes (Hall 1980: 70). Men's shirts characterized as having elements of the Northern style have closed sleeves, as well as bands of beading attached to separate pieces of skin and sewn on in strips (Figure 36) (Hall

1980: 69). In addition to the Northern Plains, some Southern Plains and Southwestern tribes who had migrated from the north in early historic times preferred the tailored shirts (Hall 1980: 69). Men's shirts characterized in the Southern style are fitted to the body of the wearer, with long and tight sleeves, and have long fringe, and small areas of narrow beading (Figure 37) (Hall 1980: 69). Figure 38, a man's shirt from the Northern Plains is dated to between 1830 and 1850 and has the simple design of the period as well as the hallmarks which are characteristic of Northern and Southern Plains (Penney 1992: 148).



**Figure 38. Sewn-closed skin shirt**  
Assiniboine (?), 1830-1850. University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, 24354.

Although of a later date than that attributed to the Navajo jacket, the red trade cloth, long fringe, and panels of beads in lazy stitch rows on a Ute shirt in the collections of the National

Museum of the American Indian in Figure 39 recalls similar design characteristics used in the Navajo jacket (NMAI 2012).



**Figure 39. Shirt**

Ute, 1870-1880. This shirt reflects the hybridization of Plains styles and utilization of European trade goods. National Museum of the American Indian, 21/122.

Another example showing the Ute's propensity of trade cloth ornamented with beaded panels and a buckskin fringe is shown in Figure 40, one of several pictures of Chief Ouray in a long overcoat of trade cloth. Ute culture reflects elements from both the Southwest and Great Plains, such as the wide beaded panels which are characteristics of Central and Northern Plains (NMAI 2012) and the designs similar to Southwest styles (Hall 1980: 63).



**Figure 40. Ute Chief Ouray and Otto Mears**  
 Between 1860 and 1880. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American  
 Ethnology, photographer. Allen Tupper True and True family papers,  
 Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 10601.

Based on the characteristics and associated history of these construction materials by Native peoples of the Plains and Southwest, aspects of the jacket can be used as evidence leading to a possible date of manufacture and original use. These aspects have also provided clues for comparative analysis to other extant objects, and also photographs from the time period. The specific materials and the characteristics of construction suggest that the jacket dates to before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was worn on special occasions. Pony beads and lac dyes were common construction elements on native-made objects until the 1860s and 1870s, when they were slowly replaced in popularity and use by both seed beads and cochineal dyes. The simplicity of the beaded motif in color scheme and execution makes a tribal or regional

attribution difficult. When viewed in combination with the lac dye and pony beads, the lack of identifiable regional attribution can be used as evidence to suggest that the panels were created prior to the emergence of identifiable styles. As for a regional or tribal attribution, based on comparative examples and the construction materials, the original attribution of Navajo seems to still be relevant. Joe Ben Wheat also believed that the style and materials of the shirt were consistent with Navajo manufacture of the time (Moore 2003: 199). However, given the jacket's similarity to later Ute and Cheyenne styles of the 1860s, it is also possible that the jacket is not of Navajo origin. This is in line with the inclination of Dr. Ann McMullen, Curator and Head of Collections Research and Documentation at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution Cultural Resources Center, who suggested that a Ute designation would be reasonable for the jacket (email to author, March 29, 2013). Dr. McMullen also directed me to *Navajo Beadwork: Architectures of Light*, a publication with footnote referencing UCM 25132, and discussing its tribal affiliation (email to author, March 29, 2013). According to the footnote, beadwork was originally traded from the Utes to the Navajo who preferred embellishing to outright beadwork, so this piece may have traded hands and come to belong to a Navajo person (Moore 2003: 199)

#### 'Before' of Collecting

In addition to the uncertain tribal attribution and date of manufacture for the jacket, little is known about its specific life history before it was donated to the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. According to Curator Joe Ben Wheat, the collector and owner of the jacket prior to the museum, the jacket was taken as a war trophy before 1846 by the Mexicans (Moore 2003: 199; UCMNH 1985). The shirt was presumably "collected from a Navajo 'chief' around 1850 by a Pueblo Indian who accompanied one of the United States punitive expeditions

against the Navajos (Frank and Holbrook 1990: 5). Between its acquisition by a “Pueblo Indian” and the 1970s, the shirt was used in one of the Rio Grande Pueblos for ceremonial dances (Frank and Holbrook 1990: 5). It is also reported to have been seen and described by an American soldier in 1886 (Moore 2003: 199; UCMNH 1985).

### The ‘Scene’ of Collecting and Life in the Museum

In 1973, Joe Ben Wheat donated the jacket to the museum, along with the sparse life history information associated with it, having collected it at Santo Domingo Pueblo around the same time (UCMNH 1985). According to the object’s catalogue description, the grandson of the owner sold it because he could no longer dance (UCMNH 1985). Director Peter Robinson wrote to Wheat thanking him for his gift of UCM 25132, “a Navajo shirt-jacket from the period 1800-1850” (Robinson 1973). He notes how well the jacket will fit into and add to the existing collection, and remarks on its unique nature. The jacket was formally appraised in 1974 (Ashton 1974) after it was permanently accessioned into the collection, where it began to attract scholarly research and attention.

Although Wheat donated the jacket in 1973, he returned to it again in the late 1970s during the course of his Southwestern textile studies. Because the jacket was of Navajo origin and constructed using trade cloth, it dovetailed with his larger textile project and provided an intriguing piece for additional research and testing. In the course of the extensive textile survey to establish and better understand the chronology of southwestern weaving, Joe Ben Wheat partnered with research specialist Max Saltzman to test and identify dyes and colorant (Wheat 2003: 11). In 1978 Saltzman conducted a pilot study for Wheat, testing ten samples from the University of Colorado Museum collection, including the jacket (Wheat 2003: 11). The findings

of the study included cochineal, aniline, and lac dyes. The jacket was found to have trade cloth dyed with lac. Because the three dyes produce such similar colors, determining the exact dye through scientific testing provided insight for identifying certain time periods and was useful in his overall project. Thus, the dye test added evidence that supported Wheat attribution of a pre-1850 manufacture for the jacket, object 25132.

Joe Ben Wheat cited the jacket in, *Blanket Weaving of the Southwest*, which was published posthumously in 2003 and edited by Ann Hedlund, a textile scholar and protégée of Wheat. Hedlund's 1990 work *Beyond the Loom: Keys to Understanding Early Southwestern Weaving*, highlights the research of Joe Ben Wheat to create his chronology, and also references UCM 25132 (Hedlund 1990: 20). Published in the same year, Larry Frank and Millard J. Holbrook's *Indian Silver Jewelry of the Southwest: 1868-1930* features the Navajo jacket describing it in reference to the "diverse influences upon the Navajos, through trade materials and trade routes" (Frank and Holbrook 1990: 5).

In January 2011, the Navajo jacket was part of a consultation with Navajo tribal consultants Timothy Begay and Tony Joe, who determined that it is not Navajo (UCMNH 2011). If they are correct, their denial of Navajo attribution changes its meaning and the way we understand it within the museum, as it had previously been cited as Navajo-owned for more than a century. Although Mr. Begay and Mr. Joe did not believe the jacket was Navajo, they did not clarify whether the Navajo attribution was inaccurate for the jacket's place of origin and manufacture, or subsequent use contexts. Due to the many use contexts of object, it is possible that the jacket was not made by a Navajo, but may have been used and worn by a Navajo person during its lifetime. In 2012, textile conservator Paulette Reading prepared a condition report and treatment proposal for the piece (Reading 2012: 1-6). The goal of the treatment would

be to stabilize the jacket by addressing and stabilizing the most significant structural problems, as well as cleaning for visual improvement and long-term preservation. A main treatment was proposed, as well as several add-on options, totaling to more than \$6,000 with about 85 hours of labor (Reading 2012: 5). To date, no steps have been undertaken based on the 2012 treatment proposal.

### Conclusion

There are many gaps in the life history of this object that cannot be recuperated due to lack of documentation and the many shifts in context, significance, and meaning the jacket experienced over the course of nearly two centuries. It is also difficult to pinpoint cultural affiliation for the piece due to the overlapping and multiple identifying markers which represent the styles of several regions and cultures. It may not even be completely accurate to attribute a hybrid object, like UCM 25132 to a single tribe, because the manufacture and use contexts of the jacket may cut across several tribes throughout its lifetime. The concept of hybridity is therefore useful for understanding this jacket in the context of its creation and use, because it acknowledges the interactions and exchange of cultures and lifeways which generate new and unique forms of culture and material culture (Kreps 2003: 14). The jacket is a hybrid object, because it illustrates that culture is not fixed, bounded, or discrete, and it physically embodies the idea that exchange and interaction are multi-directional and involve two-way processes of lending and exchange. Because of the unique union involved in their creation, hybrid objects are often enigmatic and although they require the examination of a complex web of interactions between and across cultures, they can provide a wealth of potential information about interactions, accommodations, and negotiations when studied (Phillips 1998: 16).



## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion

A museum is said to be fulfilling its duties of stewardship, security, legal, and preservation, and retaining intellectual control of its collection if an object is associated with a catalogue number and that information is linked to the official catalogue register. If an artifact tag listing the date, provenance, name, number of a specific object has become unassociated with that object and lost or if its record cannot be located within an official catalogue, the object loses credibility, relevance, and value in terms of the overall collection. The object no longer fits into the classification scheme that was applied when the museum acquired it. In contrast, an object can have little associated records documenting its history, origins, and provenience, but still be considered within the responsible stewardship boundaries of collections care. Changes in the ideologies of museums, collecting, and stewardship through time have affected what attributes about objects, collections and acquisitions are judged to be of importance. Maintaining intellectual control of objects by classifying and ordering them has been a constant in museums through their history, as has the use of a classification system based on Western ways of knowing the world. The importance of clearly documenting an object's life history, on the other hand, has undergone ebbs and flows throughout the history of museums and collecting. This provenance information has not always been of central importance in comparison to the integrity of the object itself and integrity of the object within the museum's classification scheme.

Museums and biographies are a logical union because they both “highlight questions around how we know and communicate the past” (Hill 2012: 1). Providing an object with a thorough biography opens up the object to an investigation, description, and understanding of

what may have seemed obscure, unknowable, and strange (Whitelaw 2012: 75). It reveals that objects are part of complex interactions, contexts, and relationships which are constantly shifting, and which continually add layers of meaning to the objects. Ultimately, it is not only the museum or the object itself, but also the connections and relationships created around objects which create meaning and hold value. Therefore, creating a life history of a museum object helps to situate the object within this web of relationships and provides the ability to see more than single facts, perceptions, or truths about the object.

I explored some specific ways that the life history approach could be used in the study and understanding of collections through their life trajectories and the relationships and interactions they have with people and other objects. As I have demonstrated with the selection of objects for which I created biographies, certain types of items attract the attention of scholars and museum professionals more than others. Often these objects are historically significant, archetypal, illustrative, or simply just mysterious and illusive. The extent to which a museum artifact is singled out for attention and analysis changes over the course of the institution's history, as ideas and theories about classification and display change through time. Interest in artifacts ebbs and flows based on the particular interests of curators, as well as the effects of the changing regimes in museological, anthropological, and ethnographic ideologies. Focus has returned to material culture with a critical eye toward the historical contexts, cultural changes through time, and ethics surrounding transactions and collecting practices that brought objects into museums. As the public face of paradigms of Anthropology, museums are called upon to respond to criticisms and concerns within the discipline. Currently, museums are challenged to better convey the stories of other cultures with the use of material things, through collaboration, inclusivity, and acknowledging multiple ways of knowing.

We know very precisely how, when, where, and why the Nez Perce two-hide dress was acquired because George Miller Sternberg carefully recorded and maintained these associations. Because the dress had such stellar provenance and typified Nez Perce women's dress of the time period, less detective work was needed to document its life history. Compare this scenario to that of the Navajo jacket, which has limited provenance information and has a history of attracting analysis and research because the details of its life previous to the museum are unknown and it is not a common piece of clothing for its origin time and place. Both of these pieces however have been utilized in research beyond the museum and its archives, because they illustrate particular facets of museum collections. The Nez Perce dress is illustrative of the common practice of souvenir-taking by United States military officials in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Navajo jacket has received much attention and analysis due to its relatively inexplicable nature. On the other hand, the Ripley quillwork outfit has received little scholarly attention or analysis either within the museum or from outside researchers. Although the exact details of its life have not been preserved, it is not associated with category of collecting like the Nez Perce dress, is it as enigmatic as the Navajo jacket. Although the Ripley outfit is a common type of object for the time period and area from which it originated, it had similar documentation gaps as the other pieces which required the same type of detective work, speculation, and generalizations to create a meaningful life history. The Ripley suit illustrates and emphasizes the idea that the creation of a biography can engage communities and recuperate even highly personalized past meanings, such as family heirlooms.

When Isabelle Medchill contacted the museum to inquire about the Case collection and the possibility that the museum might house a certain quillwork outfit, she opened up a dialogue with the institution. This dialogue is part of a larger movement by museums to better engage

with indigenous communities in the spirit of cultural preservation. As Native people work to maintain and reinvigorate aspects of culture and identity, museums “are faced with a new responsibility...to share the knowledge that they have about the collections in their possession with the Native communities from which they came” (Seip 1999: 284). Museums have records and objects to which Native people increasingly desire access and Native people have knowledge of contexts of objects that museums need for proper stewardship. Developing and maintaining a dialogue was not only important to the museum, but is also important to Isabelle for reconnecting with an heirloom and sharing her heritage. When Isabelle Medchill reconnected with her family’s heirloom, the object acted as a memory aid to her for remembering and sharing stories. Her connections to the past helped the museum to recuperate contexts and meanings which had been lost when the suit was collected.

The Nez Perce dress on the other hand represents that collecting is never a neutral process and illustrates paradigms of museum collecting, Manifest Destiny, and colonialism (Jacknis 2002: 39). The collection of war booty in the context of United States military campaigns against Native American was enacted at the peak of colonialism and salvage anthropology, between the 1870s and 1930s (O’Hanlon 2000: 5). Soldiers, like other collectors, were informed by the vanishing Indian paradigm, motivated by the limited amount of cultural material remaining on and near battlefields after battles, and driven by a competitive spirit. As such, battlefield collecting in the 1870s can be seen as an extreme example of the notion that material urgently needed to be collected before it disappeared (O’Hanlon 2000: 10; Jacknis 2002: 40). Battlefield collecting during the 1870s was government sanctioned and part of Americans’ belief that they had the duty and right to expand across their nation as they wish.

The concept of looting is also part of the biography of Casas Grandes fakes, which focuses on the unusual trajectory of a certain type of object as its contexts progressed through archaeological artifact, scarce resource, replica, forgery, art, and finally revival movement. Casas Grandes pottery was specifically chosen for its peculiar shifts in meaning, but also because it served as a model for examining the issues of fakes and authenticity in museums. This life history was created to serve as a guide for investigating authenticity and cultural attribution, especially for objects with scarce or questionable provenience.

The markers of several distinct styles and cultures can be clearly seen in the physical construction, materials and design of the Navajo jacket, making it nearly impossible to identify a single cultural attribution and accurately trace this aspect of its life history. One meaning that can be read onto it is the concept of hybridity, an idea which counteracts notions that see culture and identity as fixed, bounded, and discrete, and acknowledges the intertwining of cultures and lifeways (Kreps 2003: 15). Hybridity can aid in thinking about the multi-directional processes of exchange, and the borrowing and lending of ideas involved in creating material cultural and other cultural forms.

It is not the objects themselves that are meaningful, it is their specific histories and social interactions that create perceptions, context, and significance, and can recreate and recuperate values and stories. All of the life histories I reconstructed and documented represent periods and contexts within the history of museums and collecting, and also are a way to examine the paradigms that inform current museum practice and collections stewardship. Although there are similarities in the contexts, experiences, and meanings of some of the objects, I focused on how they each illustrate larger concepts and groupings of objects in museums. I emphasized distinct aspects of an object's trajectory, purposefully highlighting and reading carefully into contexts,

collecting practices, and meanings in each biography to illustrate trends in museums, examine the many ways the life history approach can create meaning, investigate how certain readings affect the stewardship and understanding of an object, and overall to underscore the utility of the life history approach as a part of current best practices of museum curation. Looking outward to broader applications and implications of the life history concept, the last step in my work as biographer was to add the events, meanings, and contexts I recuperated for the objects to the museum's archival files and database. If the knowledge I had acquired as I filled gaps in the object's life histories through research, comparison, and investigation, was not associated with the records in the museum files my recuperative work would have been lost. Although researching and tracing the specific histories and social interactions that create meaning, interpretations, contexts, and life events for objects can recuperate and create stories and value for objects, when applied to museum collections the life history approach aids in the stewardship of objects. Creating a tangible object biography and associating it with the documentation files in a museum increases the knowledge, understanding, and documentation of objects directly relates to how the object is understood and interpreted in light of current and museum practices, and contributes to future understanding and interpretation of objects.

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