Interior Museum Program

Interior



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Shelves

Life's More Than a Beach for Cape Cod History Students

Contributed by William Burke, NPS (Cape Cod National Seashore)

For a dozen AP History Students at Nauset High School, it didn't matter that the beach was calling on a brilliant late September Indian summer afternoon. Their high school, one of only a few actually within a National Park, had embarked on a curious pilot program. Together with their teacher, Alison Kaar, and Seashore historian Bill Burke, the students descended a darkened stairway deep within the basement of the Seashore visitor center. No, there was no need for surfboards or sunscreen. It was time to discover the intricate writings of a Cape Codder known for his research on Native Americans – Warren Sears Nickerson.

What the students discovered was simple. Nickerson's exhaustive genealogical research from the 1930s and 40s identified 1,300 Indians by names and families utilizing late 18th and early 19th century land deeds, court records, vital statistics, military lists and place names. The 1.4 linear feet of materials were in six large boxes that included handwritten notes, photo static reproductions of historic documents from the Massachusetts Archives, hand-sketched family trees, and his 130 page magnum opus: *Some Lower Cape Cod Indians*. The students read through hand-typed stories like "French Privateer," "First Blood at Nawset," "Praying Indians," and the life story of the Lower Cape's last full-blooded Indian – Micah Rafe. They quickly learned about Nickerson's frugality and quirkiness; his hand-typed stories were found on old recycled envelopes and brown paper bags, and on the back of old letters and scrapbooks. The students found irony in it all; Nickerson, a Mayflower descendant, painstakingly



Warren Sears Nickerson

recounting the demise of native culture on the Lower Cape. They saw his flaws, his ethnocentrism, his prejudices, and his romanticism. Through it all, they also saw a man ahead of his time who yearned for the past. It was a classic lesson in historiography along with the exhilaration of reading irreplaceable material - raw information that no other person came close to assembling in his day.



Student Conservation Association intern Nathan Marx works with Nauset High School students An official purpose of the project was, all along, to bring the material to the light of day. The local Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe had worked with the papers several years back, but most researchers knew nothing of their existence. Working with the park's two Student Conservation Association interns Nathan Marx and Laura Hoglund, the students scanned significant samples of the material and wrote abstracts for them. Nathan and Laura developed a searchable inventory of stories and documents, which was immediately given to the local Nickerson Family Association, and which will be made available to the public through local depositories, including Cape Cod Community College.

As the project wound down, I think more than a few of the students realized that they had zoomed past the visitor center everyday on their way to school for the past 3 years, never giving a second thought to local history – history beyond their textbooks. Now local place names meant something, their school name meant something, and their incursion into the world of primary source documents was worth the wait. They proved that sometimes high school juniors and archival materials can mix!

Paleontological Research Advances in Reclamation Collections

Contributed by Jennifer Huang, BOR

Erosion around reservoir perimeters is generally considered problematic because it diminishes the shoreline, increases siltation in the reservoir and thereby decreases overall water storage capacity. For the Bureau of Reclamation, an Interior water management agency, reservoir erosion is something to avoid. Reclamation is now fighting to curb annual erosion at southeastern Idaho reservoirs, while simultaneously celebrating an exciting side-effect—shoreline erosion has exposed a varied abundance of Pleistocene epoch fossil material.

Two geological units running through this area of the state contain significant numbers of vertebrate fossils representing large Pleistocene mammals including camel, horse, mammoth, and bison. It is touted that this area is second only to the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles for variety and quantity of Pleistocene vertebrate fossils, and represents both a nationally significant location and resulting museum collection. Much can be learned from the more than 17,000 paleontological specimens that Reclamation's Snake River Area Office curates at the John A. White (JAW) Repository at Idaho State University's Idaho Museum of Natural History (IMNH), located in Pocatello, Idaho.

Specimens in Reclamation's paleontology collection are currently being utilized in a number of research projects, including efforts at the Denver (continued p. 2)

Vintage National Park Posters Mark Reopening of Interior Museum

Contributed by Tracy Baetz, Interior Museum

After a four-and-a-half-year hiatus, the Interior Museum reopened on April 8, 2014, with a new temporary exhibition entitled *POSTERity: WPA's Art Legacy and America's Public Lands.* This visually stunning retrospective unites for the first time six original national park posters created by Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists with a full complement of contemporary editions by Doug Leen and artist Brian Maebius. Nearly 50 classic posters associated with 36 national parks, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the Interior Museum are featured.

From 1938 to 1941, the National Park Service employed artists via the WPA's Federal Art Project to produce silk screened promotional posters for national park sites. The artists worked out of a facility in Berkeley, California,



1941 original serigraph on loan from Bandelier National Monument

and the 14 designs they created were well received. With the onset of World War II, however, production ceased and the posters were lost to history until the early 1970s, when Leen happened upon an original while working as a seasonal park ranger at Grand Teton National Park. Fascinated with the artwork and the story behind it, Leen set out to learn more.

Just over 40 of these exceedingly rare national park posters have since resurfaced and are in National Park Service archives, the Library of Congress, and with private collectors. Through the course of two decades and extensive research, Leen and his company, Ranger Doug's Enterprises, have not only painstakingly reproduced the 14 original WPA designs but also—collaborating with individual parks—created and screen printed more than 25 new designs "in the style of" the WPA artists. The prints sustain a rich artistic tradition and resonate with park and vintage graphics enthusiasts worldwide.

The concept for the *POSTERity* exhibition originated in spring 2013, when the Interior Museum's collections manager Jason Jurgena approached Leen about the possibility of adding a representative sampling of his artwork to the Office of the Secretary Art Collection. Leen's ensuing gift of 90 contemporary park serigraphs readily translated to considering a comprehensive retrospective, and Jurgena and Interior Museum curator Tracy Baetz worked closely with Leen and Maebius throughout the exhibition's development. Leen and Maebius traveled to the nation's capital for the opening, and even met with Secretary Jewell and gave her a personal tour of *POSTERity*. More than 70 people were in attendance to hear Leen and Maebius speak on the rediscovery and reconstruction of these posters as part of the Museum's monthly public lecture series. Baetz also filmed Leen and Maebius in one-on-one interviews, which will be



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POSTERity features nearly 50 works of art from the Interior Museum's collection and several additional pieces on loan repurposed into additional interpretive content. Finally, Interior Museum Acting Director Diana Ziegler has planned several outreach programs as tie-ins with the exhibition. Among the most popular have been screen printing workshops where attendees have the opportunity to try silk screening in the WPA tradition.

POSTERity will be exhibited through spring 2015. For information about viewing the exhibition, visit http://www.doi.gov/ interiormuseum/posterity.cfm.

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Paleontologícal Research

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Museum of Nature and Science, University of Nevada Las, Vegas, and McMaster University. The museum's location on a university campus lends opportunities to students as well. One such ISU student is Ashley Ferguson, an undergraduate Geology major (with an emphasis in Biology) and the John A. White Paleontology Career Placement Intern. She is working with the Earth Sciences Senior

Intern. She is working with the Earth Sciences Senior Collections Manager Dr. Mary Thompson to explore an intriguing hypothesis based on the collection.

Working together, Ashley and Dr. Thompson are exploring the possibility of using landmarks on fossil bison tarsal-or ankle-bones (astragali and cubonavicular, specifically) to develop measurement ranges that could be used to differentiate bison to the species level. In southeastern Idaho, several different species were present during the Pleistocene. Ashley explains: "Currently, extinct bison species are based on skull morphology; however, skulls are not preserved well." The large number of post-cranial bison bones in Reclamation's museum collection at IMNH makes this the perfect place to conduct this study. "The [Reclamation] material is unique in that there are four species of bison living in one area. If there are considerable morphological differences between the species in post-cranial elements, then it makes identification much easier. It may also provide insight into the evolutionary history of the bison lineage."

In May, Ashley will graduate from ISU and will present results of this study at the Rocky Mountain Regional Geological Society Association meeting. She will be continu-



ing her education as. a graduate student at Montana State University in Bozeman in the fall., taking with her the knowledge that museum collections hold great scholarly potential. This current study seeks to broaden the usability and research value of the specimens within the museum collection. and stands as a remarkable example of how students can collections.

ISU student Ashley Ferguson studies engage in Federal bison tarsal bones collections

> Interior Museum Program Dr. Terry Childs Manager Steven Floray Staff Curator Lara Howerton Intern

> > www.doi.gov/museum