

PRESS RELEASE

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BARRE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION AND BARRE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, BARRE, MASSACHUSETTS

The Barre Museum Association and the Barre Library Association, the two entities that manage Founders Museum and own the articles within its collections, are pleased to provide an update on activities that we anticipate will lead to the repatriation of part of its Native American collection in the spirit of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Founders Museum, located within the Woods Memorial Library building in Barre, Massachusetts, is a diversified collection of items dating to the Victorian period (1837 – 1901), when the “cabinet of curiosities” type of museum was in vogue. These museums typically contained items of natural history, geology, archaeology, works of art and antiquities, and anthropology. Founders Museum contains items in these categories. Some of them are of Native American origin, while many are not.

The original Act of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts incorporating the Barre Library Association in 1885 authorized as one of the Association’s purposes “forming and maintaining a museum of specimens in natural history, works of art, antiquities and other objects of interest...” The original founders of the Barre Library Association responded to this purpose with great enthusiasm. Many loaned or donated their personal collections to start the museum and solicited their acquaintances to do the same. Shortly before the building was finished in late 1887, the museum-room was described as the future home of “a fine collection of curiosities given by Ginery Twichell of Brookline.” Upon dedication of the library in December 1887, donations to the Museum were so voluminous that they spilled out into other areas of the Woods Memorial Library.

In the past 135 years, the public’s use and perception of museums have changed significantly. No longer are they static collections confined to galleries and small rooms. Museum practices are very different than they were a century ago.

Since January 2022, the Barre Museum Association and Barre Library Association have taken concrete steps to start down the road to repatriation of appropriate items in the Native American collection.

Discussions and museum visits were conducted with Mia Feroletto, Editor and Publisher of “New Horizons Magazine” from January into March. She has been designated as a representative of the Oglala Lakota tribe.

Ms. Feroletto was instrumental in helping organize a trip of several individuals from the Pine Ridge Reservation and Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota on April 6,

2022, along with John “Jim” Peters, Jr., Executive Director of the Massachusetts Commission of Indian Affairs. Members of the Barre Library Association and Barre Museum Association met with these visitors and their supporters, and they were invited to tour Founders Museum and view our collections.

On April 13, the members of the Barre Museum Association voted at its Annual Meeting to continue with repatriation efforts with the guidance of a NAGPRA specialist, with the intention of repatriation of the appropriate items.

Although we had previously consulted with several NAGPRA specialists, it took two months to find a qualified person who could help Founders Museum with this important project. In late June, Dr. Aaron Miller agreed to perform NAGPRA consulting services for Founders Museum.

Also in June, we had professional testing done on Native American items in our collection to determine if there were concerns related to heavy metals, which were sometimes used in the preservation of hides and feathers. While Arsenic and Mercury were found above detectable limits in several samples, the detection of arsenic and mercury did not exceed threshold limits that would be the cause for a potential health concern.

To comply with the requirements of the consultation process, we needed photographs and a comprehensive inventory of our Native American collection.

We set up a three-day photography session from July 18 through July 20 using the services of professional photographer, John Willis, who volunteered his time to accomplish that large mission. Two individuals from Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota came to give invaluable information on the Native American items during this three-day photography session. Jeffrey Not Help Him and Leola One Feather provided expert advice on items that were of Lakota and central Plains origins.

After photography was finished, a modern and comprehensive inventory was completed by Dr. Miller. He is currently working on the consultation process.

The photography and inventory were done in Allen Hall at Woods Memorial Library. Several hundred items were photographed, and details were recorded. After the photography was finished, the items were carefully packed into archival-quality boxes pending the results of the consultation process.

Our next actions are dependent on the decisions of each step of the transparent consultation process. Through each phase, Founders Museum will take the required actions. We cannot predict the outcome at this time, or how quickly each phase will be completed. However, we are committed to moving this process forward as expeditiously as possible since repatriating items deemed culturally sensitive by source communities is the goal to which we are dedicated.

Once the consultation and repatriation process is complete, we anticipate that Founders Museum will be reorganized and once again open to the public. We eagerly await the day when we can once again share with the public the amazing items in our collections.

August 19, 2022