



GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA DOCENT CONSORTIUM

GPADC Crossroads 2022: Interconnecting Cultures, Creating Communities

Penn Museum, 19 April 2022

Welcome

GPADC Opening Remarks. GPADC Chair Anna Hadgis welcomed everyone to the GPADC Crossroads 2022 meeting. She said that being together was a dream come true. This is what life is all about, getting together, sharing our jobs, and gathering ideas that foster hope and positive change. During her two years as Chair, we could rarely socialize, but we did gain members. Anna introduced and thanked the current Steering Committee members and the past GPADC chairs.

Anna said that docents tell a tapestry of stories, often they are ones of restitution and reparation. Over the past two years, many here have created outstanding programs and shared them virtually. Who would have thought that we docents and guides would become so facile using technology and remote learning?

Our theme is what we, as docents, do: creating communities, connecting cultures. Do we have empathy? Yes, we could never support the missions of our museums without it. Do we want happy customers who are eager to come back for more? Definitely! Are we life-long learners with a passion for students, young and old? That is why we are here. Here at the Penn Museum, we are extremely fortunate to have global experts, some of whom you will meet today.

Anna introduced Kevin Schott, Associate Director of Interpretive Programs, Penn Museum. She noted that Kevin was one of the speakers at the GPADC Crossroads meeting in 2019. Kevin is the treasured leader of the Penn Museum docents, an accomplished learning specialist with expertise in engagement and inclusivity.

Kevin welcomed participants and said the Penn Museum was honored by our presence. *The Penn Museum respectfully acknowledges that it is situated on Lenapehoking, the ancestral and spiritual homeland of the Unami Lenape.*

Kevin introduced Jennifer Brehm, the new Director of Learning and Community Engagement at the Penn Museum.

Jennifer said that she has worked in museum education for twenty-five years at various institutions in the Philadelphia area, most recently, at The Barnes Foundation. She thanked everyone for their service as docents.

Jennifer gave a brief overview of the Penn Museum. Its mission is to transform understanding of what it means to be human. The museum began in 1887 with the receipt of artifacts from Nippur. Since then, it has conducted more than three hundred field expeditions; it has twenty-two curators and five teaching specialists; and houses more than one million objects. The museum's functions include the stewardship of its collections, services to researchers and education.

Jennifer noted some highlights of the education program at the Penn Museum. The Center for the Analysis of Archaeological Materials (CAAM) was established in 2013. Between 2012 and 2022, numerous digital programs were created including a YouTube channel. In 2020, the museum pivoted to digital programs. The Daily Dig is available in multiple languages. The museum has designed tours for the sight impaired.

The first part of the museum building was completed in 1899, with additions in 1915, 1926, 1929, 1970 and 2002. In the last few years, the museum has refurbished the main entrance, the Harrison Auditorium and several galleries, including those for Africa, Mesoamerica and the Middle East. Currently the galleries for the Egyptian and Eastern Mediterranean collections are undergoing renovations.

Anna introduced Dr. Brian I Daniels, Director of Research and Programs for the Penn Cultural Heritage Center at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Brian also serves as the Vice President for Cultural Heritage of the

Archaeological Institute of America; Vice President of the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield; and Secretary of the International Council of Museums' Disaster Resilient Museums International Committee. Between 2013 and 2018, he co-directed the Safeguarding the Heritage of Syria and Iraq Project. Currently, Brian coordinates the Conflict Culture Research Network, a group of scholars focused on the study of intentional cultural destruction. He has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford, Rutgers, San Francisco State University, and the American University of Rome. Brian received the Society for American Archaeology's Presidential Recognition Award for his effort to protect Syrian and Iraqi cultural heritage and the Society for the Preservation of American Indian Culture's Lynn Reyer Award for his work with Indigenous communities in California.

Program

Dr. Brian Daniels, "Connecting through Cultural Heritage: The Work of Museums in Addressing Community Needs."

Brian argued that museums should take a human rights approach to connecting communities and protecting cultural heritage. He explained that this means recognizing the rights of individuals and communities in relation to objects and cultural heritage and with the sites of their production. He noted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stated that "everyone has the right to security, dignity, and free development of personality" and that "everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of their community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancements." Although this Declaration is a "soft" law, that is, it is not legally binding, Brian said it is important as it sets a norm and a goal.

Brian stated that the work docents do make us cultural rights defenders and therefore human rights activists because we provide access, education and discussion. The work of cultural rights defenders includes three main areas: Community Engagement, Community Repair and Community Responsibility.

Community Engagement. Brian showed a funerary bust from Palmyra of the 3rd century C.E. that the Penn Museum purchased in 1887. He asked what kind of role and responsibility do we have for this object today? Brian then discussed his work with Safeguarding the Heritage of Syria and Iraq Project (SHOSI) which began in 2013. At the time, there was not a lot of expertise on how to respond in an emergency. How could cultural workers on the ground be supported? Over time, SHOSI developed a variety of strategies related to training, salvage, education, inventory-taking, capacity building, public awareness, and recovery and he showed us several examples of this. One of the most striking was the Cultures in the Crossfire: Stories from Syria and Iraq of 2017. The goal of this Penn Museum exhibition was to show what SHOSI was doing in Syria and Iraq and therefore what a museum can do in conflict situations. The show included work by contemporary Syrian artist Issam Kourbaj, thereby creating a dialogue between past and present. The organizers developed strategies to reach out to and include Syrian and Iraqi people.

Community Repair. Brian showed a maidenhair fern basket produced on the Colfax Rancheria, California and discussed this group's land disputes with the U.S. government. These people lost their original land during the 1848 Gold Rush in California. In 1915, the federal government purchased land for them. However, in 1950 the government began to end tribes and sold the land of the Colfax and they became a federally unrecognized tribe. After several decades of fighting to regain their land, the Colfax-Todd Valley Consolidate Tribe of Colfax Rancheria partnered with Penn and successfully regained some of their land from the federal government in 2021. This prompted the state of California to return another piece of their land. Brian said this shows that an object can be seen as an invitation to cultural repair.

Community Responsibility. Brian showed a stucco Graeco-Bactrian head excavated by the Penn Museum in Afghanistan that consisted of three fragments reassembled by Penn conservators. He told us of Khalid al-Assad, Director of a museum in Palmyra, who was executed by ISIS and noted that attacks on cultural heritage and cultural workers are becoming more prevalent. The media reported that al-Assad was killed because he would not reveal the location of hidden artifacts, however, Brian said the museum's deputy director, an ISIS sympathizer, wanted his job. Significantly, the charge against al-Assad concerned his international relationships and connections. This shows the need for strategies to evacuate cultural workers in conflict areas.

For the past two years, Brian has been working with the Director of the National Museum in Kabul to develop evacuation strategies for museum workers and their families should the Taliban take control—which they did in 2021. Museums around the world offered virtual training to Afghan museum workers to help them find employment elsewhere. Many of the National Museum staff chose to remain and protect their collections. The U.S. does not have any programs specifically for museum workers although there are programs for scholars at risk such as the Scholars Rescue Fund and the Artist Protection Fund. Situations such as the one in Afghanistan illustrate the importance of focusing on the human rights of cultural workers.

Brian also addressed the current situation in Ukraine and the work of the Heritage Emergency Response Initiative, led by the Director of the Kyiv Museum. The Initiative consists of museum directors, curators, staff, docents and the public. He showed a poignant photograph of individuals carrying a statue of a crucified Christ from a church to save it from destruction. That, Brian claimed, is the work that we—including docents—do and he thanked us for it.

Questions and Answers. Below are Brian's answers to attendees' questions.

They work to relocate not only the museum worker but their families, as well, and to place them in jobs.

The Penn Museum Education Department spearheads efforts with underserved communities.

Much of the work to assist Indigenous communities on the East Coast is done by the Native American Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania. There was a big disconnect between the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century and the lack of attention paid to Native American rights and issues. A 1978 U.S. edict granted freedom of religion to Native Americans and eventually led to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This act covers the repatriation of human remains but also of religious or sacred objects. It recognizes that the purposes and uses of these objects is more important than their provenance or legal ownership.

Museums have a history as elitist institutions and we are trying to change that. We have a challenge and an opportunity. What connections can we make? We must talk about repatriation and restitution, but we must also collect new things.

The Penn Museum is working on the repatriation of the Benin bronzes in its collection. It is Brian's opinion that they should be returned to Nigeria.

The work Brian does partly comes from requests for repatriation but it is not the only thing that concerns other cultures. Our focus must be on what these other cultures want and need.

Brian received resounding applause and Anna thanked him for a fascinating and thought-provoking presentation.

General Business

GPADC Slate of Officers for 2022-2024. The slate of officers was unanimously approved. Anna thanked the current Steering Committee members for their service.

Program

Dr. Christopher Woods, Williams Director, Penn Museum. Chris, formerly the director of the Oriental Institute of Chicago, is also a scholar of Sumerian cuneiform.

Chris said that museum work is about telling stories: who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. The docent program is at the heart of the Penn Museum's mission as it joins communities with the collections. He is impressed by the devotion that the museum inspires in its docents. Chris pointed out the breadth of the museum's collections and believes the museum can help transcend differences by creating empathy.

Chris told us about the Heritage West project. Given the recent situations with the Morton collection and the remains from the MOVE bombing, it is more important than ever that the museum forge new connections with West Philadelphia communities. Heritage West is a community-driven archaeological project. Members of the community work with museum staff, collaborating on issues of race and justice in archaeology. They have formed a partnership with the People's Emergency Center and Black Bottom Tribe Association. It is a two-year project and will include excavations at a local site beginning in 2023.

Chris described the transformation of several museum galleries to make them brighter and lighter and to enhance the visitor experience. The goal is also to highlight the relevance of the collections to contemporary events and issues. Transformed galleries of the Eastern Mediterranean and Egyptian collections will be opening soon.

Chris discussed some of the museum's efforts related to audience engagement and inclusivity. There are currently more than five hundred programs per year with 15,000 on site participants, and two-thirds of these programs are free with admission. 29,000 people participated in on site or virtual programs during the pandemic. The Culture Fest programs, which focus on various cultures, include exhibitions, music, performances, activities, workshops and food. The museum partners with various community cultural organizations to create them. The Global Guides program and the Artist in Residence program provide another way for community members to tell their own stories. The Stories We Wear exhibition also involved a collaboration with local communities and organizations. It highlights two thousand years of fashion and style around the world and contains a variety of items, including attire worn by Philadelphia icons such as Marian Anderson, Grace Kelly and an Eagles football player.

The K-12 Program served 35,000 children during FY2021. In FY2019, a typical one for the program, more than 50,000 children participated in person. The program fosters understanding of unfamiliar cultures. Additionally, a Freeman Foundation Grant provides for Chinese speakers to talk with students about Chinese culture in the International Classroom Program.

Unpacking the Past is a similar program. It serves more than six thousand students at 93 Title 1 Philadelphia Public Schools each year. Since its inception seven years ago, 50,000 students have participated. Penn Museum educators visit school classrooms; students come to the museum for tours and workshops; and each student's family receives a one-year membership.

Chris ended by saying there is a new climate today. Museum goers are not passive viewers but rightfully interrogate collections and interpretations. He thanked all docents for their service.

Questions and Answers. Chris provided the information below in response to questions.

The Penn Museum has approximately two hundred Benin bronzes and Chris is working with officials from Nigeria to legally return them. He views this process as an opportunity to forge new partnerships and collaborations. For example, some of the works may be on long term loan to the Penn Museum; the Penn Museum may be involved in conserving these objects; and the museum may have opportunities to work on excavations in Nigeria. He noted the Penn Museum has extensive experience in repatriation because of its former work with NAGPRA.

The Morton Collection includes skulls of Black Philadelphians, possibly those of formerly enslaved people. The museum formed a West Philadelphia Advisory Committee, making sure to include the most vocal critics of the Morton Collection, and they agreed to bury remains in an historically Black cemetery and erect a memorial.

Unpacking the Past began with a grant that is about to end. The museum has found some donors to keep it going. Chris successfully lobbied former Penn President Amy Gutman before she left the university, and she committed the university to \$5,000,000 in funding if Chris could match that amount.

Anna thanked Chris Woods for his insights on the museum's efforts and goals concerning education and accessibility.

Gallery Tours

Penn Museum docents conducted tours of these galleries: Rome, Greece, Africa, Mesoamerica, Egypt, China, Native American Voices and the Middle East.

Special thanks to the Penn Museum docents and staff who led these tours: Michele Belluomini, Sharon Burgess, Mark Curchack, Paul Hirsch, Marjana Njergeš, Marjorie Robbins, Kevin Schott, and Mindy Widman.

Respectfully submitted by Rebecca Butterfield,

Recording Secretary