Thanks for not throwing that away: 
How archival data (unexpectedly) inform the linguistic and ethnographic record

Gary Holton, Alaska Native Language Archive
Alaska Native Language Archive

- Outgrowth of more than 50 years of research at Alaska Native Language Center
  - ~ 1800 linear ft. manuscripts, including nearly everything written in or about Alaska Native languages
  - ~ 7000 recordings
- Coverage of all 20 Alaska Native languages
- Related languages outside Alaska
- Others (Alaska Russian, Alaska Saami, Chinook Jargon)
We can’t save everything... or can we?

- The digital realm offers the promise of “all-selective optimism” (Ooghe & Moreels 2009)
  - declining costs of digital storage
  - decreasing role of the archive in appraisal and selection
- Countering this are some more prosaic constraints
  - even with unlimited storage, there remain real costs associated with accessioning and storing digital materials
  - archives still have an important evaluative role to play
    - “Future users may not thank us for a swathe of poorly shot and edited, highly compressed and barely watchable video material.” (Nathan 2007)
Justifications for throwing things away

- Yes, archives do throw things away
  - deposit agreements typically give the receiving archive discretion to determine disposition, including destruction

- Justifications for destruction include:
  - Inability to curate materials
  - Outside the scope of the collection
  - Non-original materials
  - Superseded by subsequent deposit
Inability to curate materials

- Brick and mortar archives may not be able to accept materials if they are unable to effectively store and curate them.
- This is less of an issue for digital archives since format conversion (digitization) can be outsourced.
Collection scope

- All archives must decide what to collect … and what not to collect
  - PARADISEC: languages in the regional surrounding Australia
  - ANLA: languages indigenous to Alaska and related languages in Siberia
- Scope limitations impose boundaries which improve collection management, maintain focus, and ultimately aide users
- ANLA scope quite limited: materials in or about Alaska Native languages and related languages neighboring Alaska
  - in particular, ANLA does not (intentionally) collect strictly cultural or ethnographic materials with no linguistic content
Broadening the scope

- Arguably, ANLA’s collection scope is too narrow
- …at least our user community seems to think so
- As knowledge of ongoing digitization efforts spreads, we increasingly receive deposits of recordings along with requests for digitization
- The most popular genre: Athabascan fiddle music

Non-original material

- Most archives keep only original materials.
- It can be very difficult (=time-consuming) to determine whether a particular item is a copy or not.
  - many language archives contain annotated materials, so apparent “copies” may actually be partially unique.
- Copies of materials thought to exist elsewhere may turn out to be the only surviving copy.
  - Since its inception ANLA has emphasized comprehensive coverage of Alaskan languages, resulting in a high level of “multiplicity”.
Bittle’s Plains Apache materials

- Plains (Kiowa) Apache [apk] is a Dene language spoken furthest from Alaska.
- ANLA accessioned these, even though they fall outside scope and are not originals.
- In 2009 the tribe requested these copies, as neither the originals nor any other copies could be located.
Gary Holton <gmholton@alaska.edu>

[Forwarded: Plains Apache Linguistic Materials]

Alaska Native Language Center <fyanlp@uaf.edu>

To: gary.holton@uaf.edu

Gary,
Are you familiar with this?
Rose

---------------------------- Original Message -----------------------------

Subject: Plains Apache Linguistic Materials
From: "O'Neill, Sean P." <seanoneill@ou.edu>
Date: Sun, April 12, 2009 7:05 am
To: "fyanlp@uaf.edu" <fyanlp@uaf.edu>

Dear Alaska Native Language Center:

I am writing to inquire about your archival holdings on the Plains Apache language of Oklahoma. I understand that you have copies of William Bittle's lexical file slips and further records created by Harry Hoijer during the 1930s.

Some years ago, the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma lost the copies Bittle himself donated to the tribe, and they have been working to obtain back up copies of these valuable records. I have been helping with these efforts, and I recently secured grant funding to build a database of the language, with the aim of producing a dictionary for the tribe.

Do you in fact have copies of these materials? What kind of copies can you provide? Is there a cost per page for making the copies?

All the best,
Sean O'Neill

Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology
University of Oklahoma
405 343 1468 (cell)
WILLIAM BITTLE'S
PLAINS APACHE
FIELD NOTES,
DATED LEXICAL SLIPS

Dated 3 Nov., 1952
The Arthur Capell collection

About the records

Title: Records of Capell, Arthur (1902-1986)
Date Range: 1844 - 2026
Creator: Capell, Arthur (1902 - 1986)
Extent: 0.85 metres (896 items)
Repository: Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures
Abstract: Arthur Capell was an Australian linguist and ethnographer who spent much time recording and documenting both Australian Aboriginal languages and endangered languages in the Asia - Pacific region. The Arthur Capell textual collection consists of some thirty boxes of notes, transcripts, and other supporting materials. What is documented in this guide are some of the records relating to his non-Australian linguistic work that have been digitally imaged.

Copyright: Paradisec believes that many of the items provided through this guide are no longer the subject of copyright restrictions, or have been cleared for display in this service by the Copyright owners. However, Paradisec invites any individuals who believe they hold current rights over items provided through this service to make contact.
Some Notes on the Languages of Pantar

James J. Fox
Harvard University

In two brief notes in 1911, Drs. Watuske identified an island of Pantar and Professor trainsmen and linguists who belong to the West-Papuan branch of the Austronesian languages. My principal research interests are concerned with the Austronesian languages, particularly those of the outer arc of the Lesser Sundas, but during a period of field work in 1972-1973 I attempted to gather comparative lexical information on all the languages spoken in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur. The preliminary indications of this research make it evident that even by conservative estimation and excluding languages spoken in the semi-permanent colonies of sea-faring peoples, such as the Samal-speaking Badjo Laut, Bajis, or Butonese who have settled in these islands in the relatively recent past, the total number of languages in this small province is in the vicinity of 40. A sound classification of
Superseded versions of materials

- Digital archiving has blurred the line between traditional archiving and publication
- Increasing emphasis on archiving in “real time” may lead to requests that drafts or other versions be discarded
Requests to replace materials

Hello Gary,

I am writing to inquire about the possibility of replacing the draft master and maps with the final versions. Would it be possible to withdraw the draft master and maps and replace them with the final versions when they are ready?

Would it be possible to withdraw the draft master and maps and replace them with the finals when they are ready?

Please allow me to send you the changed chapters later on.

Kind regards,

[Email body]

Sun, Nov 24, 2013 at 11:05 AM

To: Gary Holton <gmholton@alaska.edu>

Hi Gary,

I would like to archive the database and map the communities. I will be finalizing the master list. Is it possible to replace them with the finals when they are ready?

Would it be possible to withdraw the draft master and maps and replace them with the finals when they are ready?
Revisions hide previous documentation

- Ch’akajabena Mountain adopted as official name in 2005 following first ascent, based on Dena’ina [tfn] name for nearby lake (Ch’akajabena = ‘tail extends lake’)

![Image of Ch’akajabena Mountain and lake](image-url)
Revisions hide previous documentation
Revisions hide previous documentation

- Krauss’s isogloss maps reveal a much more complicated picture than appears in the published language map.

Revisions hide previous documentation

- Chapman’s Deg Xinag [ing] dictionary manuscript contains forms which were omitted from subsequent dictionaries
  - “afar” - “fly”  Oct 1977
  - “immediately” - “preference”  Oct 1977
  - “garden” - “husband”  Jan 1981
  - S - Z  ????

We can’t anticipate how archives will be used

- Underlying the discussion of disposition of archival materials is the increasing recognition that we can’t fully anticipate how language and culture archives will be used (Holton 2012)

- Common non-linguistic requests at ANLA
  - music
  - photographs
  - genealogy
  - history

- In spite of limited collection scope, ANLA is a surprisingly rich source of ethnographic information, thanks to “accidental” documentation — ethnographic information which slipped in during the process of language documentation
Accidental documentation

- Nonetheless, ANLA resources documenting astronomy much richer than the published documentation would suggest (Cannon 2011, 2013)
- But the best documentation of astronomy in ANLA is accidental
  - falls outside the collection scope
  - wasn’t intended as ethnoastronomy research
- This “accidental” documentation provides clues as to the apparent paucity of Dene astronomy
An Ahtna [aht] constellation

- Nekena Cu’yaaxi
- Individual stars identified with body part terms
- Term does not appear in published dictionary


Cannon (2011, 2013)
How can it be that the only named stars/constellations in Gwich’in are the Big Dipper = *Yahdii*?

A clue can be found in an interview, conducted entirely in English, with no linguistic content whatsoever:

**Interviewer:** Nobody knows about *Yahdii*, huh?
Is that a secret club?

**Frank Ginnis:** It’s a secret man.
You got, left leg, right leg, tail, left arm, left hand, nose.

Interview with Frank John Ginnis, Fort Yukon, May 29, 1986.
A Gwich’in [gwi] constellation: Yahdii

- This interview provides a “smoking gun”, the significance of which has been heretofore overlooked.

Interviewer: And you have Indian names for all these constellations, different ones, or just some of them?

Frank Ginnis: Yahdii.
Yahdii cover all the sky.
Mega-constellation Yahdii, with body-part asterisms

- New field work confirms “whole-sky” nature of Yahdii
- This field work would not have happened without archival documentation
Conclusions

- We can’t escape the need to prioritize:
  - In spite of the rise of “all-selective optimism” we are (and will increasingly be) limited by human resource constraints.

- However, before we throw things away we should:
  - Understand the potential value of non-original materials
  - Be certain that “revisions” do not hide previous data
  - Carefully consider the nature and implications of scope restrictions

- As our field matures, Language Archiving will eventually become simply “Archiving,” and language will lose its privileged status therein.
References
