



PEABODY MUSEUM
of ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOLOGY

PRESS RELEASE

Wiyohpiyata **Lakota Images of the Contested West**

New Exhibit Opens April 3, 2009

5:30 P.M. Lecture “Starting at Standing Rock: Following Custer and Sitting Bull to the Little Big Horn”

Geological Lecture Hall
24 Oxford St., Cambridge, MA

6:30–8:30 P.M. Exhibition Opening and Reception

Peabody Museum
Harvard University
11 Divinity Ave., Cambridge, MA

Exhibition Opening and Lecture Free and Open to the Public

Information: 617-496-1027



Ledger drawing by unknown Indian warrior, possibly Lakota, ca. 1865. Half Moon ledger book. MS Am 2337, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Gift of Harriet J. Bradbury, 1930. A warrior with a painted crescent moon on his face and celestial symbols on his shield rides through a hail of arrows, unscathed.

(Cambridge, February 26, 2009) The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology presents a new exhibition, *Wiyohpiyata: Lakota Images of the Contested West*. The exhibition explores the meanings of a unique nineteenth-century “artist’s book” recently discovered among the holdings of

Houghton Library at Harvard University. The book was created to preserve and interpret a ledger filled with Native American drawings, which was recovered from the Little Big Horn battlefield immediately following the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer’s cavalry by Cheyenne and Lakota (western Sioux) forces in 1876.

The ledger—believed to have originally been the property of an Anglo-American gold miner—contains seventy-seven colored drawings executed by a number of Plains Indian warriors, probably Lakotas, whose names are now lost to history.

According to Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Archaeologist Byron Olson, “The similarity of art styles suggest it was a fairly tight group where the art style was passed on within the group. The ledger was made by a warrior society, and actions depicted in the ledger were of the men who composed that society. It was another way to record a man’s war honors.” Olson has been working closely with the Peabody Museum and Houghton Library in researching the origins and significance of the ledger book.



Detail from Ledger drawing by unknown Indian warrior, possibly Lakota, ca. 1865. Half Moon ledger book. MS Am 2337, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Gift of Harriet J. Bradbury, 1930. A warrior wearing silver hair disks and a breastplate captures three mules under fire.

Using a combination of native pigments and trade materials, including ink and colored pencils, the men primarily illustrated their most remarkable feats in war against both U.S. forces and their tribal enemies. Most of the drawings seem to depict events that occurred in the 1860s. Unlike later autobiographical and retrospective ledger drawings, the Houghton ledger may have been created by members of a warrior society who had participated in recent battles together. The culture and personal

experiences of these men, who were among the last generation of mobile, independent Plains peoples, come vividly to life in their drawings.

“Wiyohpiyata” contextualizes these images in a number of frames by placing them in conversation with other objects and images. Designed by Lakota co-curator and artist Butch Thunder Hawk, the ambient installation amplifies the Lakota meaning of “Wiyohpiyata” —the metaphysical direction “west.” Thunder Hawk’s gallery design emphasizes the thunderbird and other powers of the universe that reside in the west, from which they govern warfare and communicate with human warriors. The cultural content of the images is enriched by the presence of historic Lakota and Cheyenne artifacts from the Peabody’s ethnographic collections, including several objects said to have been collected from Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa Lakota war leader who inspired the Plains Indian military resistance against U.S. expansion. The role of media in shaping cultural perceptions of the wars of national expansion is suggested by juxtaposing the ledger images with nineteenth-century American photographs, drawings, and news illustrations of westward migration and development. The exhibit also includes video about the Nokota horses descended from the horses pictured in the drawings, and video interviews with representatives of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe: Tribal Archaeologist Byron Olson, Historian LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, and Councilman Frank White Bull. Olson noted, “The Little Big Horn is sort of the iconic battle between the Indians and the military, and it holds a tremendous fascination even for people today.”

This exhibit reflects a collaborative partnership between the Peabody Museum, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, and Harvard University’s Houghton Library, which has graciously loaned the original ledger for exhibition.

The exhibition opens Friday, April 3rd, and will remain on view indefinitely.

Related Events

April 3–4 Americas Weekend Visualizing Power: Plains Pictographic Arts

Friday, April 3

5:30 P.M. Lecture

Starting at Standing Rock: Following Custer and Sitting Bull to the Little Big Horn

Nathaniel Philbrick, author of *Mayflower* and *In the Heart of the Sea*

Geological Lecture Hall

24 Oxford St., Cambridge

6:30–8:30 P.M. Exhibition Opening at the Museum

Saturday, April 4

9 am–6:30 P.M. Talks, Tours, and Conversations

Geological Lecture Hall

24 Oxford St., Cambridge

The Curators

I. Castle McLaughlin, Associate Curator of North American Ethnography, Peabody Museum (Ph.D., Columbia University). Castle McLaughlin is a social anthropologist with research interests in politics and political economy, art and visual culture, North American Indians, and the American West, both past and present. She has conducted fieldwork on Native American ranching, wild horses, and the contemporary Native American art market. Her recent work has focused on the Lewis and Clark expedition and bicentennial. She curated the exhibition *From Nation to Nation*, featuring the Peabody's collection of Native American objects collected by Lewis and Clark, and published a comprehensive study of the collection in *Arts of Diplomacy: Lewis and Clark's Indian Collection* (2003). Her current focus on the analysis of this ledger includes writing a publication for Houghton Library, to be published in 2010.

Wallace "Butch" Thunder Hawk, Hunkpapa Sioux artist and tribal arts and culture instructor, United Tribes Technical College. (MFA California College of Art and Crafts) Thunder Hawk grew up on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, where he studied tribal arts, including pipe making, with elders. He has

taught tribal arts at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota, since the late 1970s. He creates traditional Native American items, such as shields, horse effigy sticks, and weapons, but his favorite medium is stained glass. His stained glass can be seen in a number of North Dakota buildings, including the meditation room at St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck, N.D. He was invited with other artists to help recreate the famous Indian Hall of Thomas Jefferson's home in Monticello, VA for a new permanent exhibit.

About the Peabody Museum

The Peabody Museum is among the oldest archaeological and ethnographic museums in the world with one of the finest collections of human cultural history found anywhere. It is home to superb materials from Africa, ancient Europe, North America, Mesoamerica, Oceania, and South America in particular. In addition to its archaeological and ethnographic holdings, the Museum's photographic archives, one of the largest of its kind, hold more than 500,000 historical photographs, dating from the mid-19th century to the present and chronicling anthropology, archaeology, and world culture.

Location: *The Peabody Museum is located at 11 Divinity Avenue in Cambridge. The Museum is a short walk from the Harvard Square MBTA station.*

Hours: 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., seven days a week. The Museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is \$9 for adults, \$7 for students and seniors, \$6 for children, 3–18. Free with Harvard ID or Museum membership. The Museum is free to Massachusetts residents Sundays, 9 A.M. to noon, year round, and Wednesdays from 3 P.M. to 5 P.M. (September to May). Admission includes admission to the Harvard Museum of Natural History. For more information call 617-496-1027 or go online to: www.peabody.harvard.edu.

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