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Native American Archives Special Issue: Dedication

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Journal of Western Archives: Special Issue on Native American Archives Dedication

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David G. Lewis

This special issue on Native American archives is dedicated to the memory of two indigenous archive activists who recently walked on—Allison Krebs and George Wasson, Jr. This volume honors their lifelong passion for and dedication to Native American archives and indigenous ways of knowing. May their legacy and work continue through future generations of knowledge and culture keepers.

Allison (Ally) Boucher Krebs (Anishinabe) 1951-2013

Allison Boucher Krebs, also known as “Ally” and “Chi-Gaumee-Kwe,” of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, dedicated her life to service and activism for Native American youth and protection of indigenous knowledge and archives. While a high school student at Newton High School outside Boston, Ally founded the Freeport halfway home for troubled teens. Years later, while raising her young boys, Adam and Zachary Khalil, in the Sault, she served as director of the Sault Tribe's Youth Education and Activities program (YEA), from which many young tribal members have benefited. An education trailblazer, she was in the first class of women undergraduates ever admitted to Yale University. An adventurer, lifelong learner and published poet, Ally returned to academics later in life, getting a masters in educational technology at the University of Arizona's Knowledge River program, and was completing her Ph.D. in indigenous information ecology at the University of Washington's Information School and a member of the Indigenous Information Research Group.

Cheryl Metoyer (Eastern Band, Cherokee), Associate Dean for Research at the UW Information School, and Chair of Ally's doctoral committee, noted the following regarding Ally's unique knowledge and research perspective: “Ally brought the seeds of what would grow into her work on indigenous information ecology, grounded in Anishinabe ways of knowing. Ally saw, and invited us to see, and know and protect

the unseen roots of Grandmother Cedar. In turn, we would strengthen our reverence for the sacredness of all creation—naming our efforts co-creation. Ally relished the integration of knowledge, because she had an abiding sense of wonder—expressed in hundreds of questions and fine, fine ways in which she recognized relationships—always coming back to that web of relationships. Carefully and deliberately we talked about the continuum of peoplehood.”¹

It was this exceptional way of interpreting and viewing indigenous ways of knowing that set Ally apart, especially as she began to engage in in-depth collaborative research regarding the archival multiverse and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems and their incorporation into archival practices. As a researcher, activist, and leader, Ally participated in indigenous information conferences around the world in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. She also served on various groups and committees, including as the chair of the Society of American Archivists Native American Archives Roundtable and on the Advisory Board of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums. She was also an active participant in the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI).

She had recently returned to the land of her ancestors, where she focused on her own tribal language and culture and its preservation through research and archiving. She first studied her native language Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) at Bay Mills Community College, then later was mentored by individual scholars and gifted native speakers. Ally was also involved with the initial development of the Journal of Western Archives’ special issue on Native American archives and had planned to contribute an article. Her dedication to lifelong learning and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems is an inspiration to always continue to plant the seeds of change.

George Bundy Wasson Jr. (Miluk/Coos/Coquille) 1935-2014

George was an elder of the Coquille tribe of Oregon and always would state that his people were from Pistol River area in Oregon. He spent a lifetime in education, first in music (Bachelors, 1969) and then as a counselor (Masters, 1971) and then in anthropology, contributing to archaeological, ethnological and ethnohistorical research and writings beginning in the 1980s. Dr. Wasson received a Ph.D. in Anthropology in 2001 from the University of Oregon, Department of Anthropology where he wrote an ethno-biographic narrative, *Growing up Indian: an Emic Perspective*. George got his name from his father, George Bundy Wasson Sr., who was a noted Native American organizer in the early 20th century.

Dr. Wasson served in various capacities at the University of Oregon, as a counselor, and as an advisor to native students for nearly 40 years. Dr. Wasson was

1. Cheryl Metoyer, University of Washington memorial ceremony for Allison Krebs, April 22, 2013.

one of an early class of native students who in the 1960s formed the native organization, the Native American Student Union (NASU). Through NASU he and other Native and non-native students and staff formed the Native American Affairs Office in the late 1960s, which became the Office of Minority Affairs (OMA). It became a model for cultural representation that spread to all Oregon public universities. Dr. Wasson also was among the native students that conducted studies on the termination of the Oregon tribes and activated to help the tribes of western Oregon be restored in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s, Dr. Wasson undertook a new project to bring back to the tribes in Oregon the collected field research held at the Smithsonian Institution and the National Archives Records Administration in Washington, DC. George had noticed in his research, that the tribes of western Oregon had a “cultural black hole” of knowledge of their culture and history, caused by the previous 150 years of colonization, assimilation and termination. George pioneered the theory of the Cultural Black Hole, embodied by tribal members who did not possess knowledge of their history or culture, and created by the assimilation of the tribes and their subsequent termination. He sought to solve this problem by recovering tribal intellectual knowledge within the ethnographic field notes of noted anthropologists and linguists. He organized to take a cadre of graduate students from the University of Oregon to Washington, D.C. to find ethnographic documents related to southwest Oregon, copy them and return them to Oregon tribes. In his discussions with the organizations in Washington, D.C., he was told that ‘there was not much there’ and that ‘they would pay for whatever he found’. The first Southwest Oregon Research Project (SWORP), copied some 60,000 pages of documents from the National Anthropological Archives. These documents were returned to the University of Oregon and given back to the Oregon tribes in a Potlatch in 1997. Then in 1998 a second SWORP project went to Washington, D.C. to come back with another 50,000 estimated copies. George served as the principal researcher of the first project and advisor of the second project which was fully supported by the UO departments of the Knight Library Special Collections Division, Department of Anthropology, Graduate School, and the Natural and Cultural History Museum, as well as grants and fellowships from the Smithsonian Institution.

After his Ph.D. in 2001, George continued to teach and conduct research at the University of Oregon, principally in Anthropology. George was always proud for having saved the collection of letters and documents related to his father who was a noted tribal organizer, and for having been a friend to the Dalai Lama, whom he visited in Tibet. George was an accomplished singer and pianist, and was a gifted storyteller. Meetings with George could take many hours beyond their planned time, due to the wealth of stories George was known for. His favorite story was of his great-grandmother Gishgiu, who during the removal of the tribes in 1856, travelled alone from southern Oregon coast to the Coast Reservation while completely blind.

George has left an incredible legacy of former native and non-native students who have been exposed to a treasure trove of research about the tribes of Oregon,

and exposure to archival repositories, who are today developing programs in cultural heritage at the tribes. The SWORP collection is the most accessed collection at the University of Oregon Special Collections and University Archives, and is highly valuable for the tribes who received gifts of copies of the collection in 1997 and 2001. Dr. George B Wasson's loss is of an incredible library of information about the tribes of Oregon, and of a man of incredible inspiration to native students and scholars. His last days were spent telling stories to Native students at the Many Nations Longhouse at the University of Oregon.