

Reparative Description, Indigenous Partners, and the **SNAC** Edit-a-thon

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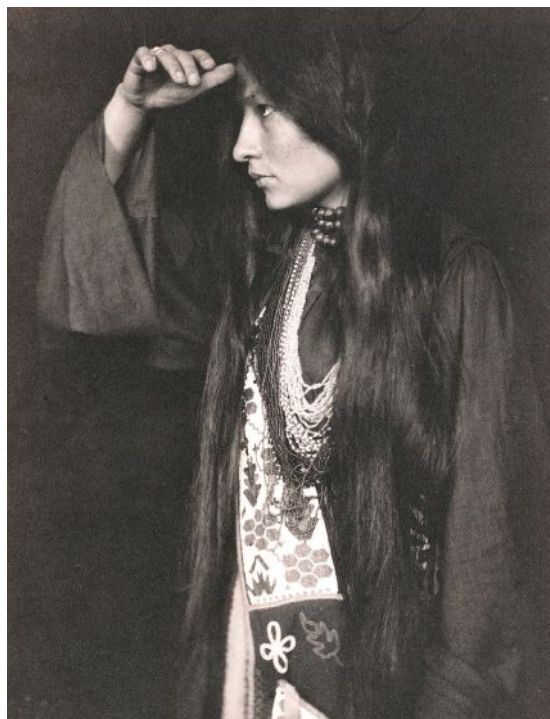
The Social Networks and Archival Context—a.k.a. SNAC—is a free, online resource that helps users discover biographical and historical information about individuals, families, and organizations that created or are documented in primary sources and to see their connections to one another. Users can find archival materials from cultural heritage institutions around the world.

In ongoing efforts to increase diverse representation of entities in SNAC and to ensure that records related to Indigenous and Native communities are described in ways that reflect and respect them, SNAC hosted an “edit-a-thon” on October 11–12, 2021. This event, held during Indigenous People’s Day, extended the work of SNAC’s 2020 edit-a-thon centering Indigenous records and consciously included a greater Indigenous presence by having an Indigenous advisory board, targeting outreach to Indigenous participants, and developing an Indigenous editorial guide.

In preparation for the event, SNAC’s project team and the Indigenous advisory board developed documentation to guide participants in editing description and addressed concerns with the SNAC platform, such as information privacy, inclusion of Indigenous editors, exposure to sensitive materials, and cultural sensitivity throughout the event. Shaping the edit-a-thon around these concerns was a necessary part of guiding editors in reparative description and creating records that reflect how communities want to be represented.

The project team included Lydia Curliss (University of Maryland iSchool; Nipmuc Nation), Irene Gates (The New School), Dina Herbert (National Archives and Records Administration), Diana Marsh (University of Maryland iSchool), Katherine Satriano (Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University), and Jerry Simmons (National Archives and Records Administration).

The Indigenous advisory board consisted of Indigenous library and archives practitioners and academics: Margaret Bruchac (University of Pennsylvania), Stephen Curley (National Native American Boarding School Coalition), Taylor Gibson (Gąhsronih), Eric Hemenway (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians), Keahiahi Long (University of Hawai’i at Mānoa), and Melissa Stoner (University of California at Berkeley).



During the SNAC edit-a-thon, participants revised entries for Kapi’olani, queen of the Kingdom of Hawai’i in the late nineteenth century (top photo, *courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division*), and Zitkála-Šá, a Lakota writer, editor, translator, musician, educator, and political activist (bottom photo, *courtesy of the National Museum of American History*).

Defining Goals

To center contemporary Indigenous perspectives, the project team reached out to Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) and Tribal community contacts based on the entities that participants identified for editing. For each entity, the project team organized a list of appropriate contacts and alerted them to the fact that entities related to their Tribe or Nation would be edited. Making THPOs and other Tribal contacts aware of SNAC as well as providing them with the opportunity to review edited records for accuracy and proper representation was an important step in the process.

In an initial email to participants, the following goals were outlined for the project:

1. Facilitate discovery of archival material that has been dispersed to multiple repositories, and connect related Indigenous, Native

American, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or First Nations people.

2. Create more and fuller records for Indigenous people and their histories and utilize decolonizing methodologies to create more accurate records.
3. Facilitate knowledge sharing of related archival material through a community effort.
4. Develop recommendations, protocols, and best practices for SNAC to better represent and accurately describe Indigenous records.
5. Build community capacity by training more Indigenous editors of SNAC.

These goals were designed to foster engagement with Indigenous participants, create greater awareness of Indigenous records, and facilitate knowledge sharing across the archival community. In our aim to prioritize Native American and

Indigenous participants, we offered honoraria for their time and participation, funded by the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies.

Structure of the Edit-a-thon

All participants took part in a two-day training session prior to the edit-a-thon. To accommodate participants in different time zones, the edit-a-thon ran from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET. We opened the first day by bringing together participants and grounding our time with intention. Advisory board members Margaret Bruchac, Taylor Gibson, and Melissa Stoner offered words of welcome. Then the project team and advisory board shared their experiences with and goals for the edit-a-thon, and participants introduced themselves and shared what entities they planned to revise.

[Continued on page 19 >>](#)

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Reparative Description, Indigenous Partners, and the SNAC Edit-a-thon

continued from page 5

Throughout both days, the project team, advisory board and SNAC reviewers (Jodi Berkowitz, Betts Coup, John Dunning, Kit Messick, Becca Morgan, and Sarah Rigdon—all of whom are members and editors of the SNAC cooperative) helped participants with their records. We hosted two Google chatrooms—one for all participants and one for only Indigenous participants. Additionally, in response to feedback from the advisory board, we set aside space for Indigenous participants to intentionally reflect on the work and connect with one another. Advisory board member Melissa Stoner hosted two Zoom rooms on each day where Indigenous participants could gather. During a closing session, the project team, advisory board, and Massachusetts elder Elizabeth Solomon reflected on the importance of reparative work for the archival field.

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Revised Records, Policies, and Processes

The documentation that the project team and advisory board created—a code of conduct, content warning, suggested reading list, editorial guide, and protocols for reporting sensitive materials—set the tone of the event and got participants on the same page. These documents were so effective that the SNAC Editorial and Standards Working Group has adapted some of them for SNAC's broader policies, such as the SNAC Cooperative Ethos for Care in Editing Records.

During the edit-a-thon, participants worked on more than fifty entities. Here are a few highlights:

- **Kapi'olani** (December 31, 1834–June 24, 1899), who was the queen of the Kingdom of Hawai'i as the consort of her second husband Mō'i (king) Kalākaua, who reigned from 1874 to 1891 until Kalākaua's death, at which point she became known as the Dowager Queen Kapi'olani.
- **Zitkala-Šá** (Zitkálá-Šá, Lakota for Red Bird), also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (her English and married names) (1876–1938), who was a Lakota writer, editor, translator, musician, educator, and political activist.



Ada Delutuk Blackjack. *Courtesy of Wilfrid Laurier University in Canada.*

- **Ada Delutuk Blackjack** (May 10, 1898–unknown) who was born in the Iñupiat village of Spruce Creek, in what was then known as the District of Alaska. She was recruited for an expedition to Wrangel Island in the Arctic Ocean, of which she was the only known survivor.

In response to the concerns of the advisory board, we implemented a secondary peer review process. Records revised by newer editors are generally reviewed by a designated experienced SNAC editor to make sure that they comply with SNAC requirements. We

took the peer review process a step further to have Indigenous participants, project team members, and advisory board members review each record to make sure it accurately reflected the Indigenous community, considered Indigenous perspectives, and used appropriate language.

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Future Work

Looking ahead, we plan to continue increasing accessibility and visibility of Indigenous archival collections in SNAC for the communities represented in them. One way we intend to do this is by increasing the presence of Indigenous editors and establishing an Indigenous Description Group (IDG) under the umbrella of SNAC's Editorial and Standards Working Group.

Additionally, one of the products of the edit-a-thon was an Indigenous SNAC editorial guide, which draws upon several other sources. It is our goal to publish this style guide with open access to help other archivists think about how they approach archival cataloging and description of Indigenous materials. Future grant projects might further expand the work of SNAC's Technical Infrastructure Working Group to inform the development of the SNAC platform and training sessions to better fit Indigenous needs. ■

Authors' Note: Thank you to our edit-a-thon participants without whom we would not have had an event. We also thank our Indigenous advisory board: Marge Bruchac, Stephen Curley, Taylor Gibson, Eric Hemenway, Keahiahi Long, and Melissa Stoner. And a shout out to the SNAC editors who served as reviewers for the edit-a-thon, including Jodi Berkowitz, Betts Coup, John Dunning, Kit Messick, Becca Morgan, and Sarah Rigdon.