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## Silver Horn's Winter Count: An Archival Record of Indigenous Time Featured in a Smithsonian Exhibition

Elena Myers, Diana Marsh, and Candace Greene

*Documenting Diversity: How Anthropologists Record Human Life* is an exhibit showcasing the history of anthropological fieldwork through rare archival and print materials from the National Anthropological Archives and the Smithsonian Libraries. The exhibit, two cases in the Evans Gallery (ground floor) of the National Museum of Natural History, opened on March 12 and will be on view for 16 months when the museum reopens.

Specifically, the show traces the progress of technologies used to record human life, from paper to film to today's digital media. The exhibit also grapples with the limits of such documents. Some ethnographic "data" resist documentation. It may be hard to record, or Indigenous community members may not choose to share it (especially with white anthropologists collecting it). But this is not always the case.



Figure 1: Page from *Silver Horn's winter count* depicting the years 1832-1835. As anthropologist Candace Greene describes in her book on *Silver Horn*, the wolf drawn in the first summer indicates that the Medicine Lodge Ceremony was held at Wolf Creek that year. The following summer (represented by a tree in leaf, because no Medicine Lodge Ceremony was held) marks the massacre of a Kiowa village in which the Osage attackers carried off the sacred *Taimé*, the figure shown shrouded in feathers. After that was the winter the stars fell, when a meteor shower was visible across the Plains. MS 2531, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

The exhibit features an exquisite piece in the hand of master illustrator [Silver Horn](#), or

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Haungooah. Silver Horn (Figure 1) was a Kiowa artist distinguished for his prolific career and intricate drawing style.

The “[Silver Horn pictorial calendar](#),” as it is listed in the Smithsonian Collections catalog, is called a “winter count” (*sai-guat*) by the Kiowa. Smithsonian anthropologist James Mooney commissioned the calendar in 1904, and today it stands as an exceptional record of Native historical knowledge preserved in document form.

In Silver Horn's rendering, time passes left to right across the page, marking winters with bare trees and summers with the forked pole that was erected in the annual *Kado*, Medicine Lodge Ceremony. The drawings associated with each season marker depict noteworthy events of communal memory. For example, the winter of 1833-34 is remembered as “The Year the Stars Fell,” after the striking Leonid meteor shower (Figure 1).

As a collective history standardized for use by all Kiowas, the events chosen to “name” specific seasons were not necessarily the most important, but rather the most memorable—the death of a well-known warrior, the outbreak of a deadly disease, or the location of the *Kado* that brought the entire tribe together.



Figure 2: As Greene writes in *One Hundred Summers: A Kiowa Calendar Record*, in this “Pawnee killed winter,” Silver Horn's detailed rendering of the dress and decoration of a noted brave Pawnee warrior demonstrates his respect for the figure. MS 2531, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Knowledge of history was held in communal memory and passed down through the oral tradition. The responsibility for recording year names their chronological order was assigned to calendar-keepers (a role Silver Horn inherited from his great-uncle Tohausan, a principal chief of the Kiowas, by way of his father also called Tohausan).

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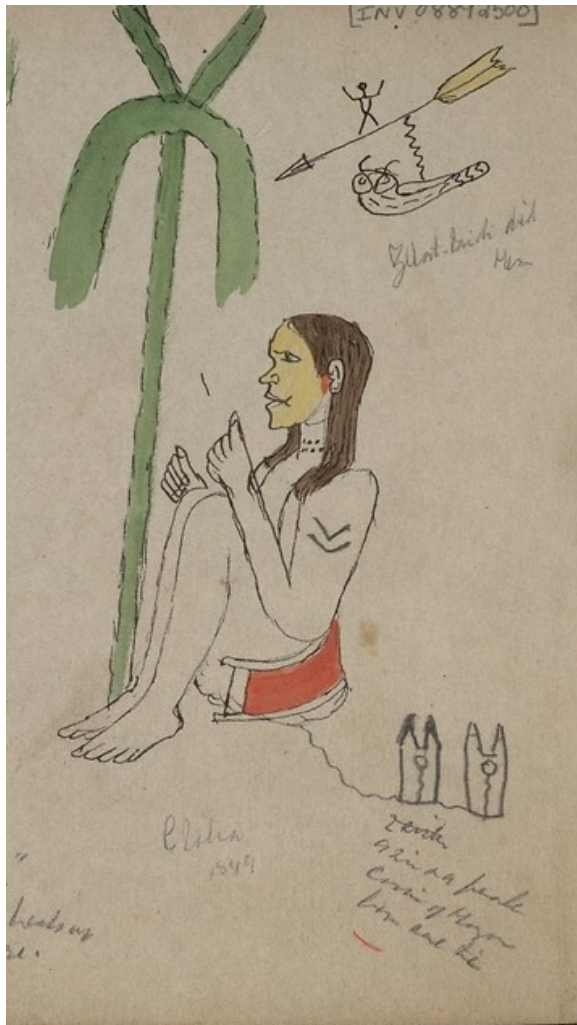


Figure 3: *Summer of 1849: Entry for the summer of the Cramp Kado.* The crouched figure represents the cholera epidemic that swept the Plains that year. Silver Horn also notes the death of On the Arrow from the disease with a unique pictorial convention, the death owl. The cradles in the bottom right corner denote two significant births. MS 2531, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

All members of the community could then refer to the calendar when placing their own life's events, when the calendar made appearances at social gatherings. Silver Horn told Mooney that he was born in the summer that Bird Appearing was killed, 1860 (Figure 4).

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Figure 4: Summer 1860: Entry for "Bird Appearing killed summer," shown with a bullet streaking toward his name glyph. MS 2531, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Most winter counts were intended as utilitarian mnemonic devices (Figure 5). Detailed narrative illustration conventions were reserved to tell stories of war. Silver Horn appears to have merged these two traditions, creating a novel form of historical storytelling.

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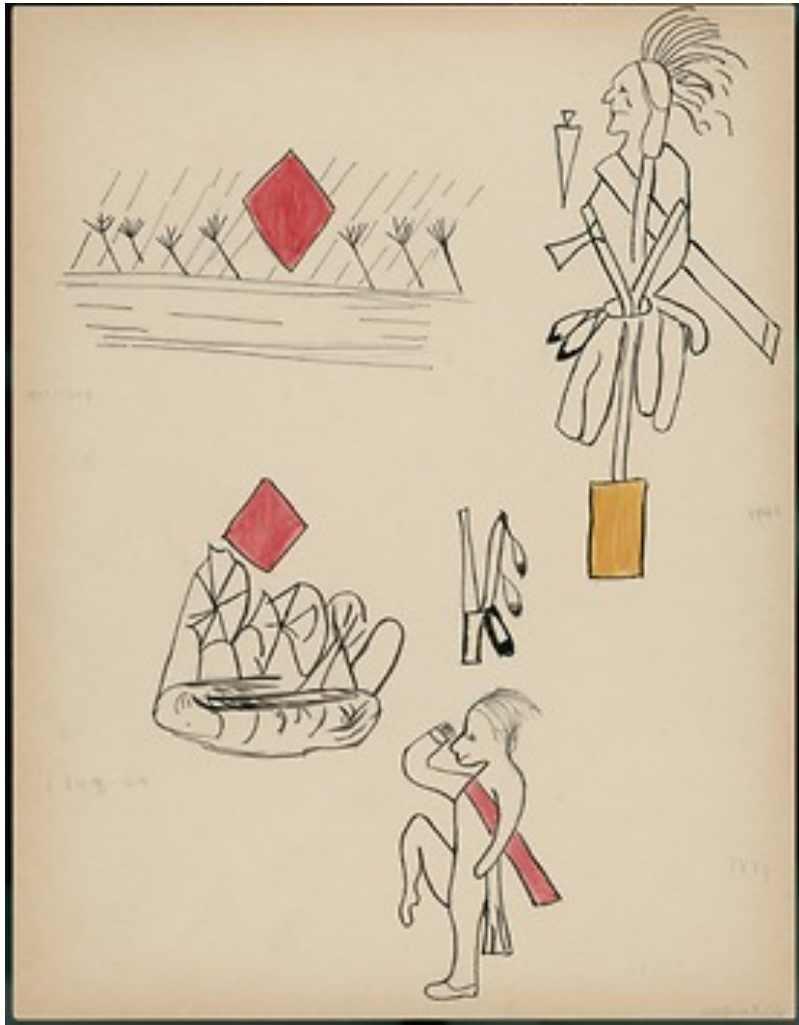


Figure 5: James Quitone (Wolf Tail), winter count page representing the years 1847-1849. MS 2002-27, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

The calendar commissioned by Mooney in 1904 is actually a copy, reproduced from Silver Horn's less-elaborate original. Silver Horn maintained the original for several decades after the copy ends, and passed many of the stories on to his family. The calendars thus stand not only as a record of the past, but as an investment in the future: the endurance of Kiowa history.

*Documenting Diversity* was curated by postdoctoral fellow *Diana E. Marsh* and Curator of *Globalization and Acting Director of the NAA Joshua A. Bell*, and collaboratively produced by the *National Anthropological Archives and Human Studies Film Archives*, the *Smithsonian Libraries*, and *Smithsonian Exhibits*. When it reopens, it will be on view in the *Evans Gallery* on the ground floor of the *National Museum of Natural History* for 16 months.

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**Candace Greene** is an anthropologist of the Plains Indians who was based at NMNH until her retirement, and worked closely with the Silver Horn family and other Kiowa

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people to combine Indigenous perspectives with archival research on Mooney and other turn-of-the-century anthropologists. Greene has published extensive “translations” of these calendars, and this post relies heavily on her research and publications.

### Bibliography

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