

The American Indian Records Indexing Project

Responsibility. Relationship. Restoration.

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is a database being compiled for the Office of Trust Records that contains detailed inventories of archived government records received from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians and the Office of Indian Education Programs.

The project was initiated in December of 2002 in connection with the Cobell v. Norton class action lawsuit. Its purpose is to facilitate the court-ordered production of documents for Indian affairs litigation and to assist the Office of Historical Trust Accounting and the Office of the Special Trustee in the reconciliation and management of several hundred thousand Individual Indian and Tribal trust accounts held by the U.S. Government.

The inventories being created contain comprehensive information about each box of records that is indexed:

- The title of each file within the box
- The types of documents within each file, including identification of specific transactions involving fiduciary trust accounts and Indian land holdings
- Beginning and end dates for each file
- Specific dates of transactions involving fiduciary trust accounts and Indian land holdings
- Individual Indian and Tribal account numbers found within the documents
- Tribes and agencies referenced within the documents

What Is Contained Within The Records?

- **Financial Records**

- IIM and Tribal Trust Account transactions and statements
- Indian Trust Fund investments and earnings
- Payments and collections from Indian land leases
- Transactions involving sales of Indian land and resources
- Per capita judgments, awards and payments
- Federal and Tribal grants and contracts
- Federal and Tribal budgets and spending
- Employment, education and general assistance payments

- **Indian Land and Resource Records**

- Indian Land allotment, assignment, ownership and heirship records
- Leases, permits, easements and right-of-ways for the use of Indian land and the removal of resources
- Production reports of resources removed from Indian land
- Range, boundary and resource maps, assessments and surveys

- **Personal Records**

- Social service and assistance records
- Child welfare, guardianship, custody and adoption records
- Education records
- Birth, death and marriage certificates.
- Tribal enrollment and Indian blood degree records
- Family trees and Indian ancestry records
- Personal correspondence

- **Historic and Cultural Records**

- Tribal history and customs records
- Tribal resolutions and treaties
- Tribal Government constitutions, laws and elections
- Minutes and transcripts of Tribal Council meetings and Indian court proceedings
- Tribal membership and census records

What Has This Project Accomplished?

Since the project began in December of 2002, over 185,000 boxes of Indian records have been indexed. To put that in perspective, one box of records is roughly equivalent to one standard-sized filing cabinet drawer; that amounts to 46,250 filing cabinets!

What Does It Take To Accomplish This?

The indexing project currently utilizes 78 operational staff members:

- 42 Indexers
- 20 Quality Controllers
- 8 Inventory Control Personnel
- 6 Supervisory Staff Members
- 1 IT/Database Specialist
- 1 Administrative Specialist

70 of these staff members have at least one year of specialized experience on this project. In total, the project staff represents 279 combined years of experience, averaging 3½ years of experience per person.

What Is Left To Be Accomplished?

There are over 11,000 boxes of records currently waiting to be indexed, but it doesn't end there. On average, more than 500 boxes of newly archived records arrive to be indexed each month, and 3,643 boxes have been received in the last three months alone. The need for indexing will continue for as long as the records continue to be created and archived.

Why Is The Project Ending?

It was announced recently that the budget for the indexing project is being eliminated and that a plan is in place to conduct a similar but massively scaled down version of the indexing project at the American Indian Records Repository in Lenexa, Kansas. This new project would utilize completely new database software and an entirely new staff of 12 indexers, 9 quality controllers and 1 supervisor.

Why Is This A Concern?

1) New database software: By using new database software, 185,000 boxes worth of existing data will have to be merged into the new database. This can potentially create problems for the researchers and solicitors who are used to using the existing system and causes concern over the possible corruption or loss of data in the merging process.

2) Entirely new staff: No one from the current project is being employed, contracted or consulted in any way about any aspect of the project. 78 employees and 279 years of experience will be discarded in favor of 21 employees and no experience.

3) Volume of work: With new records arriving at a rate of more than 500 boxes per month it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for 12 inexperienced indexers to keep up. With more than 11,000 boxes already waiting to be indexed, they will be starting in a hole that may be impossible to climb out of.

Why Must The American Indian Records Indexing Project Be Saved?

The Federal Government is responsible for more than 300,000 IIM and Tribal Trust accounts amounting to untold millions of dollars belonging to Native Americans all over the country. The Office of Historical Trust Accounting depends upon this project to successfully manage these accounts.

There are over 200 active and pending federal court cases involving Indian and Tribal litigation. The Department of Justice attorneys assigned to these cases depend upon this project for research and court-ordered document production.

Without the work being done on this project, all of these records and all of this history will be lost among a sea of unidentified paper. As the records continue to pile up, the work that has already been done will be for naught, and we will find ourselves in the same situation the Cobell case is trying so hard to fix.

To eliminate or even reduce this project would be a grievous disregard of our legal and moral obligation to maintain and protect the trust assets of Native Americans nationwide. It would also be a monumental step backwards in our promise to correct the trust management system, and further damage an already tenuous relationship between American Indians and the Federal Government.

Please don't allow this to happen.