

Native American Women's Playwright Archive
HST470
David Ward

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The Walter Havighurst Special Collections archive located on the top floor of King Library at Miami University in Oxford Ohio contains over 90,000 rare and fascinating items. Among the many items that are stored there, a collection has been assembled of works and information regarding Native American Women Playwrights (NAWPA). With over 30 linear feet there are many items to sift through. The simple cardboard storage boxes belie the wealth of what is inside of them; with material from 1967 until the present, there is information in many different media focusing on many playwrights.

The collection includes materials relating directly to the formation of the archive. Items included in this are notes, correspondence, forms, finance reports and other administrative records from the advisory board. There is also a collection of documents pertaining to the planning and execution of events sponsored by the Native American Women Playwrights association. This document group includes financial and travel records, and video recordings of performances and discussions. Excellent information for researching the founding and establishment of the collection as well as what the collection has been able to accomplish and its direction from the date of founding until now.

One playwright that may be of interest is Jules Koostachin, a member of the Attawapiskat First Nation in Canada. Dedicated to her son, Koostachin's play, "Asivak's Creation Story," focuses on the story of two differing indigenous worldviews that force ancestral enemies to overcome their differences and fulfill a sacred prophecy. Alongside this play, one can find a collection of Koostachin's poetry "Reclaiming Matriarchy: The Red Path" and a screenplay for "The Passing of Souls". These works are supplemented by copies of her resumes, as well as

correspondence that provide insight into the history of this playwright and artist. This is excellent information for anyone seeking to do personal research about the life of an indigenous female playwright.

Another playwright who is included in the collection is Monique Mojica. Much like Jules Koostachin, Monique Mojica is also a First Nations woman as well as a playwright, director and actor. She is a child of one of the founders of Spiderwoman Theater. Her collected items include her biography, correspondence, plays and some relevant biographical materials such as a remittance payment sent through Western Union. Two plays found in the Archive were written by Mojica. These are *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* and *Birdwoman and the Suffragettes: A Story of Sacajawea* which is actually a radio play on audio tape, as well as a performance essay. Also included in the collection is "Staging Coyote's Dream" Volumes I and II, which are collections of First Nation dramas translated into English.

The Spiderwoman Theater is also heavily featured in the archive. Spiderwoman Theater was founded in 1976 by Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel and Muriel Miguel—three Native American sisters with a mission to present theatrical performances based on the culture and themes from indigenous peoples' performance practices. They seek to challenge their audiences and make a space where indigenous women can express their talents and create a discourse around cultural, social and political issues. Plays performed by the Spiderwoman Theater that are found in the collection include: *Women in Violence*; *The Lysistrata Numbah*; *Winnetou's Snake Oil Show From Wigwam City*; *Cabaret: An Evening of Disgusting Songs and Pukey Images*; and *Sun, Moon, and Feathers* among many others. Promotional items and posters, programs from the above listed plays as well as others, photographs, articles written by and about the playwrights

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and plays and even taped performances that include both live action as well as audio recordings are included in the collection, which aids research on the topic.

The Native American Women's Playwright collection at Miami University is still growing, yet even in its current form, contains many items relevant to research pertaining to the history of Native American Women in the modern era, specifically Native American theater productions. The additional information that can be found relating to their lives and each woman's personal history is also essential to any aspiring biographer or necessary information to chart the development of this aspect of theater production and talent development. With what is here now and what is bound to come, there is great potential for anyone that is looking into the performance art created and produced by Native American Women.