

LIFTING NATIVE VOICES

The Fund for Native American History

While growing up in South Dakota in the 1950s and 1960s, longtime MNHS member Lorraine Hart recalls how her family valued time together, especially over the dinner table. With both of her parents working in the newspaper business, opinions and points of view were encouraged and listened to in a welcoming and supportive environment. One of the many topics her family discussed was the underrepresentation of Native voices and the lack of opportunities for Indigenous peoples throughout their home state.

In June 2023, Hart attended an MNHS coffee chat that featured Native American artist-in-residence Fern Cloud. A member of the Upper Sioux Dakota Community/Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation, Cloud is an artist and educator who specializes in traditional hide painting, among other crafts. In 2023, she was awarded a residency with MNHS's Native American Artist-in-Residence (NAAIR) program, which is designed to support the continuation and the recovery of traditional Native arts. At the coffee chat, Cloud demonstrated her art form of buffalo-hide painting using bone brushes and natural pigments. Hart noted, "It was a great combination of a very talented artist demonstrating her skills while passing on the importance to us of keeping those traditions alive."

Attendees at the event also learned about the work of MNHS's Native American Initiatives (NAI) department. Created in 2016, the NAI is the first of its kind in the museum field, employing an entire Native staff. The NAI seeks to work in collaboration with the 11 Native American nations of Minnesota,

as well as with the Native communities throughout the state and region, serving to reconnect Native communities with their material culture housed in MNHS collections as well as other resources MNHS has in its holdings, and to repair relationships, histories, and cultural understanding that have been affected by colonization.

Over the next several months, Hart reflected on her experience at the June 2023 coffee chat and arrived at a strategy to support MNHS's ongoing work with Native communities. In February 2024, she established the Fund for Native American History, an endowment to ensure that Native content is incorporated throughout MNHS in perpetuity. This includes support for programs, exhibitions, staffing, and Native American collections care and acquisition.

Hart's decision to start an MNHS endowment for Native content extended her previous support to other nonprofits engaged in similar work. At the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia), she had supported the 2023–24 exhibit *In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now*; and at Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), her gift supported expanding opportunities for Native reporters to chronicle issues and stories of importance to Native peoples.

Amber Annis, associate vice president of MNHS's Tribal Nation Relations and Native American Initiatives, noted, "The Fund for Native American History will enable a sustainable model of engagement and partnership between MNHS and Native communities across Minnesota. This support will help develop and maintain programs and relationships that are vital to MNHS in



Bison hide painting by Fern Cloud, ca. 2015.
122 × 84". (MNHS COLLECTIONS)

its mission to create powerful engagement opportunities through history, to cultivate curiosity, and to foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and informed society."

Hart hopes that other MNHS members will consider a gift to the new endowment—a fund that will support the sharing of Native voices, stories, and nontraditional expertise. MNHS is grateful to Ms. Hart for her extraordinary generosity in establishing this fund.

For further information about the Fund for Native American History, contact Jennifer Pogatchnik at jennifer.pogatchnik@mnhs.org.

For more information about the Native American Initiatives department see: <https://www.mnhs.org/nai>



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