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## Citing Seeds, Citing People: Bibliography and Indigenous Memory, Relations, and Living Knowledge-Keepers

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### Cover Page Footnote

Yakoke to the following kin who have shared knowledge with me, grown seeds with me, and helped my ancestral-self heal in this knowledge: hakchuma, Shiloh Maples, Rosebud Bear Schneider, Rowen White, Ohyo Osh Chisba, Kirsten Kirby-Shoote, Ashleigh Dubie, Bean Sister, Cassandra Narvaizz, Mashkodewashk, Jacob Schott, Holly Nolan, Antonio Cosme, The Detroit Sugarbush Project, Sugar Maple, Andrea Knutson, Squash Sister, Hotioka Garden. Yakoke to Tess Seipp for the ancestral spirit we share.

By turning the page or reading further, you are accepting a responsibility to this story, its storyteller, its ancestors, and its future ancestors. You are accepting a relationship of reciprocity where you treat this knowledge as sacred for how it nourished you, share it only as it has been instructed to share, and to ensure it remains unviolated for future generations.

This story is told by myself, Megan Peiser, Chahta Ohoyo. I share knowledge entrusted to me by Anishinaabe women I call friends and sisters, by seed-keepers of many peoples Indigenous to Turtle Island, and knowledge come to me from my elders and ancestors in my ancestral-healing journey.



# CITING SEEDS, CITING PEOPLE: BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INDIGENOUS MEMORY, RELATIONS, AND LIVING KNOWLEDGE-KEEPERS

Megan Peiser, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

*Halito. Sv hochifo yvt Megan Peiser; Chahta Ohoyo sia. Oklahoma atta Chahta; Waawiyantanong atta li.*

*My name is Megan Peiser, a Choctaw woman. The Choctaw removal lands are in Oklahoma, but I live in Waawiyantanong, or “where the curved shores meet”—a land currently called Detroit, Michigan. It is the traditional and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe people, and it is from this land that I write these words.*

*I share this knowledge to bibliographers, to share forward as we create an inclusive space where Indigenous knowledge lives freely in this field, on its own terms.*

What does it look like to decolonize bibliography? Course offerings at University of Virginia’s Rare Book School suggest that it is adding non-European books to the discussion of book history and bibliography. African books. Asian book and scroll traditions. Even Native American books—that is, books by or about Native Americans. But I argue that all these efforts do not decolonize the field at all; rather, they permit access to this field only through the porthole of textual production methods central to the European book tradition: the codex. Perhaps it is even too generous to call this a *tradition*; the codex might more rightly be called a *colonizing institution*. The codex, and book history and bibliography’s dependence on and obsession with this material text, knowledge containment system, and the institutions that support it, are predicated on written and pictorial knowledge transference and a dominance over any and all other forms of information *sharing*. The codex is tied deeply to forms of possession, permanence, and control—more colonizing structures.

In an interview for University of Maryland's Anti-Racism: Communities & Collaboration Series, author Honorée Jeffers talked about her ancestors coming to her in her dreams. She recounted how she opened herself up to these knowings, stories that have been asleep in her until it was safe for them to be told.<sup>1</sup> I cried hearing these words from a celebrated writer and poet that I hear from Indigenous folks every day. I felt like Jeffers gave me permission to acknowledge what was happening to me, in me.

In 2019, when I began to apprentice myself to ancestral and traditional seeds, and to the land where I live, I began to make a safe space in myself for my ancestors and for my future ancestors. As I stuck my fingers in the dirt, sang to Hakchuma (tobacco), caressed the leaves of Issito (squash), twirled with Tobi (beans), and swayed with Tanchi (corn), my ancestors found me. I slowed my life to spend more time with the plant relatives. I found myself pulled to write, to tell the stories that were inside me, awakening each day. History, research, writing, telling the stories of the past—those are my gifts. The ancestors called me into this moment in time to use them, and I try to submit humbly to that responsibility. I want to tell the stories that ancestors before me kept safe even when their worlds, their bodies weren't safe to hold them. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, tells that:

[i]ndividuals carry the responsibility for generating meaning within their own lives; they carry the responsibility for engaging their minds, bodies, and spirits in a practice of generating meaning. . . . [I]ntelligence in this context is not an individual's property to own. So once an individual has carried a particular teaching to the point where they can easily embody that teaching, they also then become responsible for sharing it according to the ethics and protocols of the system.<sup>2</sup>

That is what I look to do here.

We do not say that Indigenous knowledge was lost or stolen. No, the colonizers do not have that power. Our ways were sung to sleep, just as seeds sleep, waiting for the community of rain, soil, sun, of human fingers, to caress them awake again in the land. Seeds stolen into museums and libraries are now being rematriated—returned to the land. These seeds hold stories, histories, families and relationships; they hold sacred covenants between people and our more-than-human relatives. These seeds hold knowledge of rainy seasons, of drought. Of our ancestral

homelands, of our removal lands, of reservations, and urban gardens, of climate chaos, of love. Every daughter seed is stronger for the hardships she endures—she writes in her DNA. The more I learn about my family, work to heal the intergenerational trauma I have inherited, learn about my father’s people, my people, the Choctaw people, the more I see my work in the garden as work in an archives. As a book historian and bibliographer, tracing a book’s collation formulae to better understand how it was put together and what that means is where my expertise lay. And yet, as I work in the garden, I realize that food is book history too. Book history and bibliography, as of this moment, have no way to consider the symbiotic and living familial relationship between knowledge, DNA, culture, environment, and tradition embodied in seeds, the gardens and lands where they grow, and the human relatives who interact with those seeds in the continual living process of creating, planting, growing, sharing, eating, and living Indigenous knowledge. That is, Indigenous *texts*, Indigenous *archives*.

I do not use the term “archives” lightly—it is borrowing a colonizer’s word and idea to help me communicate this to you. As B. M. Watson and many other archivists have emphasized, an archives is not anything you want it to be, “a flashdrive is not an archives, the internet is not an archives.” Watson laments that “collections” often inspire the questions “Collected by whom? Collected why? For what purpose?”—questions historians should better ask the archives they consult.<sup>3</sup> But I think Watson would forgive, perhaps even support me here, when I say, I need “archives” as a way to communicate to settlers about Indigenous stories, citing seeds, citing memory, citing people—in a way that acknowledges the fullness of the stories and experiences contained within them—and the relationships and respect you must enter into in order to encounter these.

These seed relatives have been lovingly curated for me by many seed-keepers: archivists, who kept them, not in the way that colonialist knowledge systems keep things, by putting them on shelves, away from people, but rather by *living* with them. I cannot just name a type of corn, for example, the relative I grew this past year: Cherokee White Eagle Dent Corn. This specific corn, Tanchi, was carried by the Cherokee people on the Long Walk, the Trail of Tears. Daughter seeds of this type of Tanchi grew in my garden, Hatioka Garden, named for one of my ancestors, in Waawiyantanong, during the 2021 growing seasons. Those seeds came to me from Tlingit seedkeeper, grower, and chef Kirsten Kirby-Shoote. They traveled to Waawiyantanong from their ancestral lands to learn from seed-keepers and growers Rowen White, Mohawk; Shiloh Maples, Odawa/Ojibwe; and Rosebud Bear Schneider, Ojibwe. They became my

teachers too. There is a way to sew these seeds into the earth, to sing to them so they know that they are home, to treat them while they grow, to harvest them, to dry them, to nixtamalize them into hominy, to welcome them to our tables and bellies. Like wine, where a seed is grown, the earth that rooted it, the seasons it saw, its mothers, the hands who tend it in practice if our sacred promise of reciprocity—are bound up inside its being. You can buy seeds online, but they will not be a sacred seed, cared for by seed-keepers, unaltered by human-intervening genetic modification. What our seed relatives represent, their stories, are *our* stories and a living relationship that we have. These are not stagnant containers, frozen forms of preservation like the codex. When humans and our more-than-human relatives entered into our first treaty at the beginning of time, we both agreed to give up a little of our wild to care for one another. That is the first treaty. The most sacred treaty. We created a living bibliography of all our names and commitments to one another in that living treaty.

How do you cite a seed? In a list of varieties? Which language do you use? How do you cite the year of harvest? The storms and heat and rain and wind and freezes that its mother plant endured? How do you continue the cultural stories connected with that seed and its place, and its language every time you plant it? How do you account for its daughter seeds? Are seeds from one harvest grown in different places “textual variants”? How do you account for the *seed-keeper*, the Fourth Sister in the Three Sisters<sup>4</sup> tradition who is a contributor on equal footing with the seeds, not master over them or subservient to them? How does the trauma of these seeds’ survivance, the communities they’ve fed, the songs that sang them out from the earth, roll into their material existence? I had thought to use this space to answer these questions.

Scholars like Robbie Richardson, Mi’kmaq, in eighteenth-century studies, and Margaret M. Bruchac on wampum in book history and archaeology have pointed to material objects of Indigenous creation and origin as essential texts and sites where Native people throughout history have communicated messages.<sup>5</sup> Often, however, Indigenous objects in museum or library settings are described through stagnant commercial properties: the type of hide used, the symbolic nature of various materials collected, the circumstances under which the object was created. Yet these discussions are centrally focused on humans as creators and manipulators of knowledge and history, rather than humans as one of many beings holding and containing knowledge in the known world across history and today. The buckskin is a gift from a relative, who gave up its life, and whose spirit still thrums in the drum, the moccasin, the medallion. It reminds us of our shared gifts, and that first treaty. Museums, libraries,



and bibliographies do not currently consider or make space for the living and life of the object. Seeds, a relative connected to all life and all animacy, hold ancestors and future generations. They hold stories; and songs, dances, histories, and folklore; ceremonies, meals, and survivance. They hold relationships with every creature, with the richness of the soil, or the strength of the winds. They hold a past land scarred by removal trauma and the current land scarred by climate chaos. Literature, history, science—these fields are just now starting to acknowledge that Indigenous ways of knowing have long outstripped these formal fields’ juvenile and colonizing traditions.<sup>6</sup> Indigenous ways of knowing have taught understandings for centuries that these academic disciplines are only now “discovering.” Will book history and bibliography wait to acknowledge living seeds, plants, animals . . . the land, as living containers of Earth’s knowledge? Or could we grapple with all the limitations we need to name and begin to stretch our field to catch up to the way that whispering grandmothers are carrying texts into dreams? Will we embrace an article in the field of bibliography that is the biography of a seed? That uses oral storytelling techniques, is present in prose or verse, and will offer up knowledge that a short citation cannot? If these lineages and storytelling are accepted in the who-begot-whom of the Christian Bible, then it seems to me that we can make space for them in the ways bibliography can and should accept and publish Indigenous knowledge-sharing as scholarship.

The dreams and knowings from our ancestors come up in us, upon us in blood memories, in seed-stories, in our medicines. A living archives is essential to Indigenous knowledge-keeping and therefore to Indigenous citational practices. As I write about the bibliography of seeds, the rich communion of the Three Sisters, the story of The Unknown Woman and how she gifted Tanchi to the Choctaw people, as I call up practices for planting, and harvesting, processing and cooking, I wonder how I will ever translate this citation practice to an academic publication—and if I even want to. These seeds, and their relationship to human relatives alive since before European arrival, before the time colonizers call the eighteenth century, continue their relationships now. How do we move away from citation and archival research seated in the destructive colonialist practice of extraction to one of reciprocity? I propose a practice that is not about a quick nod to where you *took* knowledge from, but rather a story of the important way and experience of *how* and *under what* conditions that knowledge was trusted to live on in you? How many Indigenous scholars can never share our stories because of colonial citation barriers? How many people will never benefit from an Indigenous future because we cannot grow our stories in this colonialist garden?

I keep coming to write the stories inside me, the blood memories I have been called to set into life again, and find constant roadblocks in academic writing and citation practices. Lorisia MacLeod of James Smith Cree Nation confronts the ways traditional citation practices like MLA (Modern Language Association) or APA (American Psychological Association) would have us cite our conversations with elders in our bibliography using the format of “interviews.” As a practitioner of library science, MacLeod argues:

To put it simply, to use the template for personal communication is to place an Indigenous oral teaching on the same footing as a quick phone call, giving it only a short in-text citation . . . while even tweets are given a reference citation. Some oral teachings have survived since time immemorial and deserve the same respect that we afford the great stories and minds of the Western world: a proper citation.<sup>7</sup>

MacLeod suggests instead the following citation format:

Last name, First name. Nation/Community. Treaty Territory if applicable. City/Community they live in if applicable. Topic/subject of communication if applicable. Date Month Year.<sup>8</sup>

This citation includes not only the name and tribal affiliation of the speaker but also an acknowledgment of the land (treaty territory), the community, and a description of the teaching (often they will not have standardized titles).

I love MacLeod’s intervention and believe we should adopt it. But we need to go further. Indigenous peoples understand that it is not our job to be “masters” of information; nobody can hold all knowledge, you are not supposed to. Knowledge, *aiikhvna*, is alive, and we are all responsible for the part entrusted to us: responsible for keeping it alive, for sharing it responsibly, and for ensuring it nourishes us forward to and beyond the next seven generations. Indigenous people introduce ourselves to one another, to communities, to the spirits, to the fire with a preamble: our names, our clans, our tribes, our lineage and teachers, our communities, and our land relationships. We do this because knowledge-sharing is entering into a sacred relationship and responsibility to those living stories, living knowledges. Some stories can be told only when there is snow on the ground and the spirits are sleeping. Some can be shared only over

food, or whispered near seeds, or sung along with a rattle. How do I cite that? How do I cite how these daughter seeds carry in them the knowledge and power of thriving and surviving in the wettest Michigan summer of climate chaos?

I argue that it cannot come in any kind of bibliography—a list, a description. Even as I work in other areas in enumerative, descriptive, and analytical and critical bibliography, the thought of listing these seeds out with a collation—one describing their mother-seeds, their land relationships—parallels too closely to the Dawes Rolls. The Dawes Rolls, the outcome of the Dawes Act of 1887, forcibly recorded the identities and genealogy of Indigenous peoples in the United States, mainly the Five Civilized Tribes (Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek [Muscogee], Seminole). The Dawes Rolls cemented the concept of blood-quantum—that every new generation of Indigenous peoples is becoming less Indigenous—a practice that was not only genocidal in its theory but also served as a long-term land-grab initiative.<sup>9</sup> A bibliography of seeds in our current practices of bibliography calls up for me the corporatization of seeds in the early 1900s in industry catalogs. I cannot cite Indigenous knowledge or seeds in footnotes, endnotes, or parentheticals because these citations are not an afterthought—they *are* the knowledge. I keep balking at writing the stories awake inside me because I need to know that the people who hear them will accept a responsibility to those stories. If Indigenous archives can breathe outside of our bodies, or in print, they need a preamble too. The answer to all of this came to me in seeds.

The Indigenous Seed Keepers Network and the Alliance of Native Seedkeepers are working to revitalize cultural seed-keeping practices. But they come with this disclaimer printed over the seed envelope: “Please care for these seeds in a respectful way, they are a gift of Life. By opening this packet, you pledge that these seeds or their derivitaves [*sic*] will not be given or sold to a party that is interested in patenting, licensing or restricting others’ use of these seeds” (fig. 1). By opening this packet of seeds, you enter into a relationship of respect: not an acquaintance, a *relationship*, a sacred treaty: they are now *your* relative.

To write into being the stories inside me, to enter into an understanding of seed bibliography and garden bibliography, perhaps journals and publications need to make space for a preamble such as this before the pages where Native peoples share these stories with the world, the preamble you read before this article:

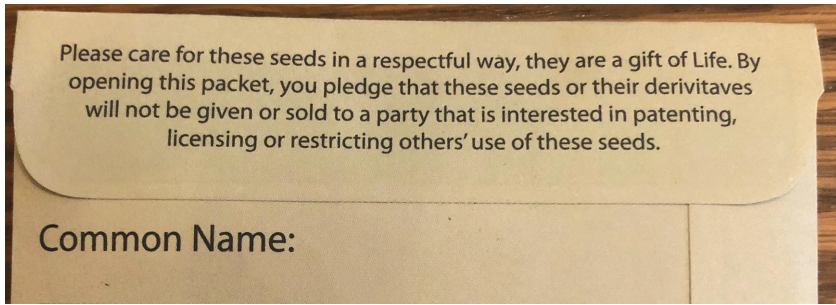


Figure 1. Inscription printed on a seed packet for Cherokee White Eagle seeds by Alliance of Native Seedkeepers. Photo by Megan Peiser, 2022.

By turning the page or reading further, you are accepting a responsibility to this story, its story-teller, its ancestors, and its future ancestors. You are accepting a relationship of reciprocity where you treat this knowledge as sacred for how it nourished you, share it only as it has been instructed to share, and to ensure it remains unviolated for future generations.

This story is told by myself, Megan Peiser, Chahta Ohyo . . .

I wanted to tell you so many stories in this piece, grapple with many big questions about Indigenous bibliography, but I had to tell you this preamble first. Our journals and conferences and monographs have to make themselves sacred, like fire, before Indigenous ways of knowing or being will ever thrive here.

*Megan Peiser is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She is an assistant professor of literature at Oakland University. Her monograph, The Review Periodical and British Women Novelists, 1790–1820, and accompanying database, The Novels Reviewed Database, 1790–1820, are forthcoming. With Emily D. Spunaugle, she is codirector of the Marguerite Hicks Project.*

## NOTES

Yakoke to the following kin who have shared knowledge with me, grown seeds with me, and helped my ancestral self heal in this knowledge: Hakchuma, Shiloh Maples, Rosebud Bear Schneider, Rowen White, Ohoyo Osh Chisba, Kirsten Kirby-Shoote, Ashleigh Dubie, Bean Sister, Cassandra Narvaizz, Mashkodewashk, Jacob Schott, Holly Nolan, Antonio Cosme, the Detroit Sugarbush Project, Sugar Maple, Andrea Knutson, Squash Sister, Hotioka Garden. Yakoke to Tess Seipp for the ancestral spirit we share.

1. Honorée Fanonne Jeffers, “Honorée Fanonne Jeffers in Conversation with Kerry Sinanan,” University of Maryland, Antiracism: Communities and Collaborations, YouTube, September 20, 2021, <https://youtu.be/Zw-Dd7iBlzg>.
2. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 156.
3. B. M. Watson, “Please Stop Calling Things Archives: An Archivist’s Plea” in *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2021/please-stop-calling-things-archives-an-archivists-plea>.
4. The Three Sisters of traditional Indigenous planting (called by colonizers “companion planting” or “intercropping”) are corn, beans, and squash.
5. Robbie Richardson, *The Savage and Modern Self: North American Indians in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, illustrated ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); and Margaret M. Bruchac, “Broken Chains of Custody: Possessing, Dispossessing, and Repossessing Lost Wampum Belts,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 162, no. 1 (2018): 56–105.
6. For example, ecologists and firefighters recognizing (possibly too late) that the controlled burns practiced by Indigenous peoples of the land currently called California kept it safe from drought and wildfires for centuries. “Discovery” of “prehistoric” footprints confirm that Indigenous people were on the land mass currently called North America for much longer than historians have claimed, though Indigenous folks have always known this. See “How the Indigenous Practice of ‘Good Fire’ Can Help Our Forests Thrive,” University of California, April 6, 2022, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/how-indigenous-practice-good-fire-can-help-our-forests-thrive>. And Matthew R. Bennett, David Bustos, Jeffrey S. Pagati, Kathleen B. Springer, Thomas M. Urban, Vance T. Holliday, et al., “Evidence of Humans in North America during the Last Glacial Maximum,” *Science* 373, no. 6562 (September 24, 2021): 1528–31, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abg7586>.
7. Lorisia MacLeod, “More Than Personal Communication: Templates for Citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers,” *KULA: Knowledge Creation, Dissemination, and Preservation Studies* 5, no. 1 (June 23, 2021): n.p.
8. MacLeod.
9. The Dawes Rolls can be found digitized by the National Archives of the United States of America here: <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/dawes>.

