

Susan Ellis, Moravian Historical Society, and Katelyn Lucas, Delaware National Historic Preservation Officer

Lenape Ancestors Return Home: Building Relationships Between Moravian Cultural Institutions and Native Nations

Primary Focus Area: Indigenous and cross-cultural encounters in Moravian heritage contexts

This session focuses on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) as it relates to Moravian institutions and the Indigenous Nations of Lenape (aka Delaware) people. NAGPRA is a federal law that mandates the identification, protection, and return of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. Katelyn Lucas, the Delaware Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), and Susan Ellis, Executive Director of the Moravian Historical Society (MHS), will outline the NAGPRA compliance process and discuss best practices for institutions seeking to consult with the Lenape on various initiatives.

The Moravian Historical Society has recent experience working with the Lenape on NAGPRA compliance, which offers a valuable window into this process. Susan Ellis will discuss the benefits of tribal consultation for institutions, including: enhancing information about your collections; developing more collaborative and culturally sensitive exhibitions; and fostering relationships with Indigenous communities.

Founded in 1857, MHS is the third oldest historical society in Pennsylvania. The organization has a long history of research, publications, exhibitions, and interpretation. The collection consists of more than 20,000 historical objects, including a significant number of early musical instruments, furniture, decorative arts, paintings, and textiles. More than 3,000 photographs, a historical library, and archives are also maintained. The expansive collection of Moravian mission objects demonstrates Moravian work around the world.

Dr. Lucas will provide a brief overview of Lenape history, removal, and their Nations today, highlighting connections to the Moravians. She will also discuss Lenape perspectives on NAGPRA and provide examples of partnerships that have developed between the Lenape and institutions in their homelands, offering guidance on consultation best practices.

As a result of fragmentation from over a century of removals from their homelands, there are multiple related federally recognized Nations and First Nations of Lenape people in the United States and Canada today. In addition to Delaware Nation, they are Delaware Tribe of Indians (Bartlesville Oklahoma); Stockbridge Munsee Community (Bowler Wisconsin); as well as three Nations in Ontario Canada: the Munsee Delaware Nation; Eelūnaapēewii Lahkēewiit (Delaware Nation at Moraviantown); and Delaware First Nation of the Six Nations of the Grand River. All of these Nations were invited to participate in tribal proceedings related to the repatriation from MHS.

Biographies

Dr. Katelyn Lucas serves as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) for Delaware Nation—one of the federally recognized Nations of Lenape people now located in Oklahoma as a result of forced removals from their homelands in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Dr. Lucas manages Delaware Nation’s extension office on Lehigh University’s campus (Bethlehem, PA). She recently earned her PhD from Temple University, specializing in early American and Native American literatures with an emphasis on Lenape history and sovereignty. As a THPO, Dr. Lucas has been involved in many NAGPRA consultations and repatriations conducted jointly with the other Nations of the Lenape people.

Susan Ellis has served as the Executive Director of the Moravian Historical Society since 2018, where she oversaw the organization’s compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Over the last three decades, Ellis has held administrative positions in higher education and non-profit cultural organizations where she developed community programs for diverse audiences. She holds a BFA from Tyler School of Art and an MS in Instructional Design and Technology from Lehigh University.