



April 17, 2013

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George Horse Capture Sr., “Nay Gyagya Nee” (Spotted Otter), Dies at 75
One of the First Native American Museum Curators in the United States
and Leader of Native Museology

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian is sad to announce the passing of George Paul Horse Capture Sr., “Nay Gyagya Nee” (Spotted Otter), the former Deputy Assistant Director for Cultural Resources for the museum and later Senior Counselor to the Director. A beloved colleague to many, he passed away yesterday, April 16, at the age of 75.

“He will be remembered not only as a dear friend and colleague, but as a leader in the reform of museology as it relates to Native peoples, and as one of the founding thinkers of the National Museum of the American Indian,” said Kevin Gover (Pawnee), director of the museum.

Horse Capture was widely published and known as an international expert on Native American art, culture and history. He took great pride in completing his life-long work of creating the Tribal Archive Project, a database that includes information from worldwide museum sources about the A'aninin (Gros Ventre).

During his ten years (1994-2004) at the museum, he was instrumental in the organizing and presentation of the new facility on the Mall in Washington, D.C. He was also an advocate for repatriation that resulted in the returning of many sacred objects to the appropriate tribes. He retired in 2004 but continued to lecture, publish and consult for many museums.

Horse Capture received his Bachelors in Anthropology from the University of California-Berkeley and his Masters of History from Montana State University-Bozeman. He became one of the first Native American curators in the country when he accepted the position of Curator of the Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming in 1979. During his tenure, George organized important exhibitions like “Wounded Knee: Lest We Forget” and “PowWow.” He also organized the Plains Indian Seminars that allowed Native people and Anglos to exchange ideas and present new scholarly material. George worked closely with Indian tribes throughout the Northern Plains insuring that their voice was heard in a museum setting. He founded the first powwow grounds

associated with a museum in the country. Annual celebrations continue to be held at the Joe Robbie Powwow Gardens.

He has received numerous awards and honors for his work, including: Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Montana State University-Bozeman; Humanities Award, Montana Committee of the Humanities; Presidential Appointee to the National Museum Services Board; and was a member of the Montana Committee for the Humanities.

Throughout his life and career George firmly believed in empowering Indian people. He served in the U.S. Navy as a ship-fitter for four years before enrolling in welding school in the San Francisco Bay area. Five year later, he became the youngest State Steel Inspector and the only minority person at that time for the state of California. Indian activism was a strong topic in the late 1960s and George participated in the Alcatraz occupation. That experience prompted his enrollment at the University of California-Berkeley.

He passed away at his home in Great Falls, Montana surrounded by his family. He is survived by his wife, Kay-Karol and his four children, George Jr. (Theresa), Joseph (Lisa), Daylight (Mike), and Peter and many grand- and great-grand children.

A family wake will be held at Mark and Elizabeth Azure's home at Fort Belknap Agency on Friday April 19 at 5 p.m. The community wake will be held at the Red Whip Center, Fort Belknap Agency, Montana on Saturday April 20 at 5 p.m. and his funeral service will be held at the same location on Sunday April 21 at 11 a.m. Burial will follow at the Fort Belknap Agency Cemetery.

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