

Kateri Tekakwitha

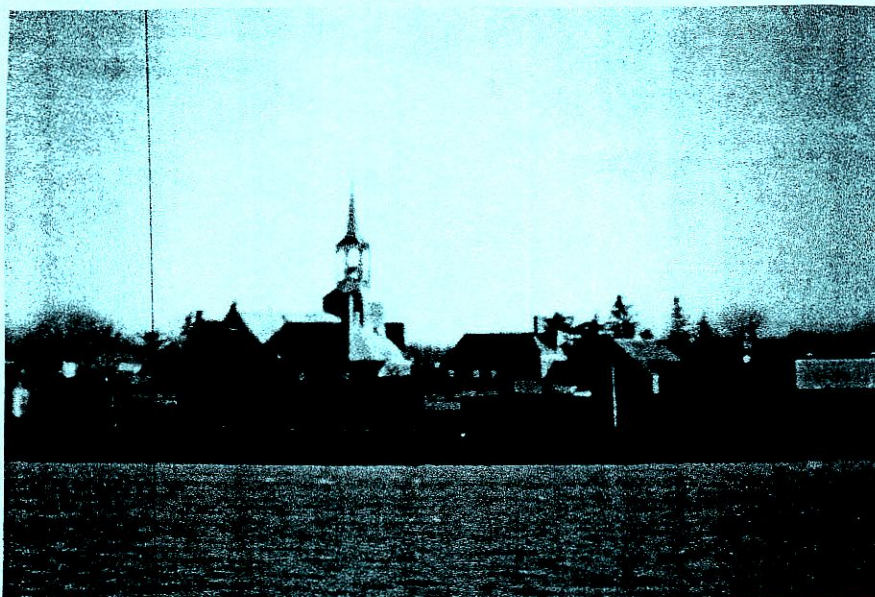
Goes to Washington to the
First Americans Festival at the
Smithsonian National Museum

Of the American Indian

On the National Mall

Washington, D.C.

September 19 – 25, 2004



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INTRODUCTION

Briefly, before I begin my account of the celebration of the opening of the Native American Museum in Washington, D.C. during the week of September 19, I would like to explain a difficulty. With the great number of related activities taking place all over the city during the Opening Ceremonies of the Smithsonian Native American Museum, it was impossible to cover the numerous events scheduled during the week. Therefore, representative ones have been chosen to express the tenor of so great a happening.

In the opinion of this writer, the Museum opening which welcomed all peoples, and while especially honoring the original inhabitants of North and South America, is the Greatest National Event to take place in the Western Hemisphere in the year of 2004. And assuredly, the event has been the greatest global event to promote world peace in 2004.

Sunday, September 19: Akwesasne Kateri Prayer Circle at Washington National

Cathedral

To start off the Celebration of the Opening of the Native American Indian Museum (NAIM), Akwesasne Kateri Singers from the northern New York State drove their van 600 miles to participate. They joined other Native Americans and Congregation members for the Native American Prayer Service held at the elegant and expansive gothic-styled Washington National Cathedral in northwestern D.C. The beloved hymn they chose to sing in Mohawk was, “Rawennio (O Great Spirit).” It was received gratefully by the Congregation.

Monday, September 20: Pilgrimage to the Basilica Shrine and onto the NAIM Reception

On Monday, in spite of the heavy traffic and not being familiar with the city, the group was determined and made a pilgrimage to honor Kateri at the Basilica Immaculate Conception Shrine. There, a base relief of Kateri is in the main church and a large white marble statue carved in Italy and donated by the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions is located in the Crypt Church.

Evening found the travelers enjoying an Invitation-only Reception for Indian performers at the Native American Museum on the National Mall. This sneak preview was a many splendored experiential delight, as one moved through the well-appointed displays after partaking of the plentiful well-appointed refreshments.

For this Reception, Marlene McCauley of Phoenix, Arizona had been given a complimentary ticket. She is an artist and author who promotes Kateri’s Cause wherever she

travels. Actually, she extols the virtues of Kateri to whomever she meets. She witnesses that her son Peter was healed of deafness through the Blessed. With her, she brought her painting of “Kateri and the Children of the World” that she had had enlarged to 3’ by 5’, laminated, and converted into a banner to carry in the Procession taking place on Tuesday. As I have said, she introduces and reintroduces everyone she meets to holy Kateri Tekakwitha, who one day will be canonized and then will be called St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

Tuesday, September 21: Grand Opening Day Procession and Kateri

The day of the public Opening Celebration started with the Grand Entry on the National Mall. Staging began at the Smithsonian castle building close to the Washington Monument. This edifice is about one mile from the National Capitol, where our Congressmen meet to pass legislation for our nation.

It was still dark when those participating in the procession began to arrive. At first, because of the fewer early arrivals, it was easy to find the group one would join. From St. Regis in Upstate New York, came a bus load of 55 Kateri pilgrims. Other pilgrims came in private cars. All joined the group that had come on Sunday.

At daybreak, the morning sun broke through, giving its warm blessing to the event about to happen on the Mall. More people crowded the Gathering Place. It became more difficult to find the assigned group spaces. With a prayer to Kateri, her people were joined.

Msgr. Paul A. Lenz, Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions and Ex-Officio of the National Tekakwitha Conference Board appeared from seemingly nowhere with his trusty Nikon camera and for the record, snapped photos of the Kateri group. He gathered the faithful friends of Kateri in a circle and all prayed Kateri’s Prayer for Canonization. This was

a Kateri moment: A Catholic priest came to pray with Kateri's people, invoking her presence at the Opening of the Native American Indian Museum in Washington, D.C.

Sr. Kateri Mitchell, Executive Director of the National Tekakwitha Conference, brought the Conference Banner and guided the marchers into position. The Friends of Kateri were anxious to be marching behind the banner "Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Conference". Within the group were other Kateri-honoring Banners. Furthermore, as the group marched in procession, they promoted the Lily of the Mohawks by passing out 3,000 prayer cards, 2,000 Kateri button badges, and explained her holy Catholic life all the way to the Four Directions Stage on the eastern edge of the Mall. From this vantage point, the Reflecting Pool and the Capitol Building were only a stone's throw away. It was awesome and humbling to see the Capitol and the Washington Monument so close—constant reminders of the privilege of being a part of the great United States: American, we love you!

By 10:00 A.M., the sun had heated the Mall to a temperature of 85°F. (As a matter of fact, the sun shone each day of the opening festivities for which all were grateful: there was no rain to drench the crowds.)

The marchers wore their native dress of hand-woven cloths, bright-colored beaded articles, feathered head-dresses in small and large patterns, leather pants and leather skirts, head bands, fur-trimmed leg wear, ringing bells generally attached to legs, traditional face designs, gay ribbon clothing trim, beaded and painted shoes and boots, facial masks, and bright colored patterned shawls. Many proudly held their Eagle Feathers. Some played their drums and flutes

as they marched. Some danced their native dance when there was a lulling pause in the line of march. Everyone was caught up in the moment.

There were just fewer than 20,000 registered marchers. Some tribes or provinces did not register by the September 14 deadline. When the registered Procession Tribes were sorted by State Province, the data showed:

- 23 groups registered over 115 participants.
- the largest contingency of 155 marchers came from Oklahoma.
- California registered 711 marchers.
- Arizona registered 541 marchers.
- North Carolina registered 493 marchers.
- New Mexico registered 409 marchers.
- New York registered 389 marchers.
- Connecticut registered 332 marchers.
- Less than 12 participating groups registered 10 or fewer marchers. Factors such as time, money, distance, and health affected participation ability.
- The above statistics do not include Native Nations Procession Organizations.
- Ten provinces of Canada were represented.
- Not registered, but in the line of March were indigenous Indians from Mexico, Bolivia, Guatamala, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. The Peruvians even brought their President Alejandro Toledo with them!

Watching the procession were over 50,000 spectators. Local citizens and tourists came to lend their support to the tribal nations from North and South America. Many schools brought

their students to be involved in the occasion. Many wanted to witness to the largest gathering of Native People ever assembled in their lifetime.

In his open letter to Native Nations Procession Participants, Director of the NAIM W. Richard West (Southern Cayenne) had predicted: “Native and non-Native supporters will walk in unison to the stage of the Grand Opening ceremonies in a highly symbolic journey east toward the U.S. Capitol. This procession, like no other in the world, will represent the enduring spirit of millions of Native People who continue to occupy this continent and their enormous contributions to the world at large. Thank you for your support of the NAIM and for your attendance on this Special Day.”

Program at Four Directions Stage and Opening of the Eastern Door

During the noon Program at the Four Directions Stage with the U S Capitol Building in the background, Director W. Richard West gave a brief Welcome speech. Remarks were made by Lawrence M. Small, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; President Alejandro Toledo (Quechua) of Peru; and U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne).

The speakers and special guests then proceeded to the Welcome Plaza at the new museum. After a few words of Welcome, a prayer of blessing was delivered by Camp Crier Moses Starr (Cheyenne and Arapaho). Local school children and special guests were then led through the Eastern Door into the depository. The Smithsonian Native American Museum was now officially open to the public! (A sidebar: the Mohawk people smile when the Eastern Door is mentioned. They know that in the historic past, the Mohawks were the keepers of the Eastern Door in the Iroquois Confederacy!)

Inside the Smithsonian Native American Museum

The Eastern Door is the main entrance to the Museum. It is etched with sun symbols from Native Cultures. Directly to the left is the Welcome Desk with visitor and membership information. On one wall, welcome messages in 166 native languages are continuously projected.

A gathering place called the Potomac (Algonquian/Powhatan word meaning “where the goods are brought in”) is the point of entry, the heart of the museum. This foyer is 10 stories high (120 feet) to the top of the dome and 10 times a 12-foot room (120 feet) in diameter. It is a venue for a variety of performances and cultural events. A huge skylight provides views of the sky in the heavens above. A number of rainbows are cast on the upper circular walls by eight large glass prisms on the south wall by the shining sun. Each prism is sited to the sun for a particular time of day and season. A 12-foot wall of woven copper bands encircles the Potomac. There are many other meaningful native symbols built into the very large room.

A number of elevators bring people to one of three public access levels:

On Level 1, the Welcome entrance is the Potomac, a Gathering Place. There is, also, a 322 seat circular Main Theater, which resembles a clearing in the woods under a bright night sky. It is furnished with state-of-the-art equipment. In the Chesapeake Museum Store, one can buy a turquoise necklace for \$10,000 or a choice piece of pottery for \$9,600.

“Let’s eat” Mitsitam Café overlooks the outdoor flowing waters on the north side of the museum. Meals and snacks offered are based on the indigenous foods and culinary traditions of the Americas. One can challenge the squeamish of heart to distinguish between a regular restaurant hamburger and a tasty buffalo burger. It is delicious!

Level 2 contains a second gift shop. The Museum Store has a large variety of items catering to a modest purse – books, jewelry, tapes, clothing, and musical instruments.

Level 4 houses two exhibits: Our Universes and Our People.

This level is a good place to begin exploring the museum. The 125 seat circular Lelawi Theater prepares the visitor for the themes and messages encountered in the exhibits. One is immersed in the vibrancy and diversity of Native life across the hemisphere and its connections to land, community, religion, self-government, and self-expression.

It was Emil Her Many Horses (Oglala) that served as curator of the “Our Universes: Traditional Knowledge Shapes Our World.” He is a long-time friend of Sr. Kateri Mitchell, Director of the National Tekakwitha Conference, and Mark Thiel, Archivist of Native American History at Marquette University.

The exhibit is organized around one solar year and explores the annual ceremonies of Native peoples under a star-filled night sky. Spiritual leaders and elders from eight tribes and communities helped to develop this presentation: Pueblo of Santa Clara (New Mexico); Anishinaabe (Great Lakes Region and Canada); Lakota (South Dakota); Quechua (Peru); Hupa (California); O’eq’chi’Maya (Guatamala); Mapuche (Chile); and Yup’ik (Alaska).

The “Our Peoples: Giving Voice to Our History” exhibit relates how Native Americans look at their struggles to maintain traditions in the face of adversity. Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) was the exhibition curator. There were eight tribes and Native communities involved: Seminole Tribe of Florida; Tapirape’ (Brazil); Kiowa Nation (Oklahoma); Tohono O’odham Nation (Arizona); Eastern Band of Cherokee (North Carolina); Nahua of the Rio Balsas (Mexico); Ka’apor (Brazil); and Wixarika (Bancos, de Calitique, Mexico). Staff curator Ann McMullen helped to create the exhibit.

A spectacular “Wall of Gold” features over 400 gold figurines dating back to 1490, along with European swords, coins, and crosses made from melted gold. There are a few Bibles and Prayer Books, too, in a glass case.

On Level 3, exhibits begin with displays of Our Lives: Contemporary Life and Identities. The presentations explore the Native American by family community, language, geographic location, self-determination, and imposed legal policies. Curator Cynthia Chavez worked with eight tribes and communities to produce this display: Campo Band of Kumeyaacy Indians (California); urban Indian Community of Chicago (Illinois); Yakama Nation (Washington State); Igloodik (Canada); Kahnawake (Canada); Saint-Laurent Metis (Canada); Kalinago (Carib Territory, Dominica); and the Pamunkey Tribe (Virginia).

It wasn't an easy trip for the Canadian Vice Postulator for Kateri's Cause, but he came to add his presence to those who had come to honor Kateri at the NAIM opening. On Thursday September 23, Fr. Jacque Bruyere, S.J. flew from Montreal to D.C. Before he came to the Museum, he insisted on offering Mass in the Kateri Tekakwitha Chapel in Msgr. Lenz's office on H Street. He had lunch in the Mitsitam Cafeteria. (He declined the suggestion of trying the delicious Buffalo Burgers.) After lunch an elder Inuit woman from Alaska, beaming with her love and respect for the Lord's priests, asked Fr. Bruyere to bless her and her daughter. (Yes, Father always wears his Roman collar!)

The Kaknawake's large display on Level 3 impressed the Vice Postulator. In the photo frieze of the village in the exhibit, the St. Francis Xavier Mission Church where Kateri's remains are entombed, is clearly seen.

Shown are several of the athletic skills of the tribe including, of course Lacrosse. Tribute is paid to the agility of the Mohawk men to manage their balance while erecting high-rise skyscrapers and high bridges.

The Educational Resource Center is a reference area. It is made up of the Interactive Learning Center with 18 public-access computers, a work-study area, a classroom, reference books and pamphlets, Native-produced curricula, tribal newspapers, and periodicals. All of these materials give glimpses into contemporary Indian life. A long glass wall affords a stunning panoramic view of the U.S. Capitol.

The Changing Exhibits showcase Native artworks. The inaugural exhibits were Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser. Morrison created works rooted in Abstract Expressional and Surrealism, while Houser often called “The Father of Contemporary Native American Sculpture,” blended Native subject matter with sleek modernistic design.

In the Windows on Collections, some 3,500 objects highlight Native American objects: animal-themed figurines, beadwork, containers, dolls, peace medals, projectile points, and ceremonial cups.

Exterior Museum and Landscaping

The NAIM as a building is designed to blend into the National Mall’s open park-like setting. In his address to the Press Corps on September 16, Director W. Richard West expressed his vision of perceiving the building just naturally rising from the earth: the grounds surrounding the Museum are considered an extension of the building and are a vital part of the museum as a whole.

Native landscape occupies almost 74 percent of the total 4.25 acres and mostly reflects original growth:

- 700 trees in 25 different species
- 3,000 shrubs of 25 different species
- 30,000 herbaceous plants

The Upland Hardwood Forest is located along the northern edge of the museum site, opposite a long flowing water feature. On the eastern side of the museum are the Wetlands. The Meadowlands are located on the southwest end of the museum. Along the southern wall are the Traditional Crops such as corn, beans, squash, and other plants used for food and medicinal purposes.

Forty large, uncarved rocks and boulders, called Grandfather Rocks, welcome visitors to the museum grounds and serve as reminders of the longevity of Native peoples' relationships to the environment. Cardinal Direction Marker stones identify the four directions and are a metaphor representing all the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

The museum building has arcing lines wherever possible, avoiding sharp lines. The Kasota limestone suggests a sculptural form carved over time by wind and water. The museum has 254,000 square feet of interior space. It could contain 132 eight-room houses each with 1,900 feet of interior space. Total construction cost of the museum was \$199 million with an additional cost of \$20 million for exhibits, programs, and opening events.

Even a casual observer can readily conclude that the final product, the Native American Indian Museum, is the result of many years of thoughtful planning and dialogue with Native communities and individuals across the hemisphere. A strong and skilled design team, in conjunction with capable architecture firms and construction companies, worked together. The

result is a building and a site rich with imagery, connections to the earth, and layers of meaning filled with details, colors, and textures that reflect the Native Universe.

Festival on the National Mall

An integral part of the one-week celebration on September 21-26 of the opening of NAIM was the social activities taking place on the National Mall. This First Americans Festival paid tribute to the immense breadth of art, skill, knowledge, and wisdom among the indigenous cultures of the Western Hemisphere.

The Four Directions Stage at the eastern end of the Mall was an open-air venue that presented some of the best-known traditional and contemporary Native singers and musicians. I caught Keith Secola and his group.

At the Dance Circle Stage, the Dine Tah Navajo Dancers (youth dancers) performed the Sash Dance and the Ribbon Dance. Because the performances were so inspiring, I stayed to see the Git-Hoan Dancers (Tsimshian), who live on the U.S. west coast.

Native storytelling for students and families took place on the Raven Stage. I heard early life story experiences related by Kungiler (Kuna).

The Suyu from Upper Xingu Region in Brazil were performing on the Harvest Stage, as I chanced by. Also, I couldn't resist the next performance: Ledward Ka'apana (Native Hawaiian) and his lilting voice.

By this time, I was hungry, thirsty, and very tired. I grabbed a bite at the Three Sisters Café (yes, they, also, served buffalo burgers) and sat at a picnic table under a canopy to recuperate.

An energetic liveliness on the part of the participating spectators took place at the Potomac Stage (Musical Performance tent). About 20 very young preschoolers were dancing

uninhibited both with each other and by themselves to the contemporary music of Willie Lowery (Lumbee). They were enrolled in the Smithsonian Pre-school Children's Summer Program.

My last stop of the day was at the Workshop Stage Tent for discussion with Regalia and Instrument makers. I saw Colombian Weaving, Flute Making, Violin Development, and Percussion in Indigenous Communities.

The least active tent was the First Aid tent. In spite of the great number of people gathered and the heat on the Mall, there were very few health problems.

CONCLUSION

Both Native and non-Native peoples expressed their joy and satisfaction at being part of the Celebration of the opening of the Native American Museum on the National Mall. One effervescent young woman summed up her ideas easily and simply. Laura is from Baltimore and works for a nursery that grows plants native to the local area. From her heart, she poured forth her honest feelings:

“This the what we humans can do together. I really didn’t want to miss this. It is so right. I had both hope and despair in my heart. But this is the most hopeful thing that I have ever participated in on the Mall. It points to the direction we should go – listen to each other. This is what America is really about – a VAST EMBRACE.”

Within that vast embrace is a noble indigenous woman, a woman of quality. She lived in the Western Hemisphere from 1656-1680. Her friends came to the opening of the Native American Indian Museum in Washington, D.C. to honor her: KAIA’ TANO’: RON KATERI TEKAKWITHA, a most precious gift of the indigenous people to the world.

Some people have asked if Kateri Tekakwitha’s name appeared on the Honor Wall of the Native American Museum. The answer is, “Not yet.” There were so many tasks to be completed for the opening of NAIM, that only two sections of the Honor Wall were inscribed and hung when the Museum opened. Some 40,000 names have to be carved and the work is progressing. However, Kateri’s name is in the NAIM Resource Center Computer and is acknowledged as a name to be placed on the Honor Wall. We will keep checking in the Resource Center until we know that the holy and beloved name of Kateri Tekakwitha has been inscribed and she takes her place of honor at the Smithsonian Native American Indian Museum in Washington, D.C.

