

American Indian Studies – Ayer Collection - Archaeology, Ethnology, Art, and Language

Archaeology: The early history of American Indians includes a large collection of American archaeology. Ayer's interest led him to acquire not merely all available printed works, but also in several instances the manuscript field notes and drawings on which these publications are based. Several noteworthy collections include the following: manuscripts and drawings of Count Jean Frederic Maximilien Waldeck; sketches by W.H. Holmes of Mexican sites; E.H. Thompson's drawings of Xkichmook; and a large group of facsimile Mayan and Mexican codices.

Ethnology: Mr. Ayer's interest in the ethnology of American Indians was similarly expansive. He acquired all of the available printed material, a great number of manuscript sources, and an enormous number of drawings. Among the manuscripts, particular mention should be made of John Howard Payne papers relating to Cherokee people.

Art: Notable among the visual representations of American Indians within the Ayer collection are 1,200 red-chalk drawings of western and southwestern American Indians by Elbridge Burbank; the pencil sketch books of George Catlin; Karl Bodmer's sketches of Missouri Valley Native American people; ledger books; the Haupt manuscript and sketches of Anishinaabe people; and finally, a collection of over 3,000 photographs of individual American Indians. Many additional images of American Indians can be found in the Newberry's postcard collections, as well.

Language: In 1903, James Pilling's collection of Indigenous linguistics was acquired by Ayer. At the time, Pilling's was one of the largest Indigenous linguistic collections in the world. Linguistics and language items in the Ayer collection include texts as well as grammars and dictionaries. Of almost every Native language there is at least one example; for many, the material is extensive. Some of the more notable items in linguistics are the first and second edition of the Eliot Bible, four Sahagun manuscripts including his Nahuatl-Spanish-Latin dictionary, and many other manuscript items.