Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian Chronology

1980—Discussions begin between the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation in New York City. The Heye collection of more than 800,000 objects, representing tribes and Native communities from the entire Western Hemisphere, was and continues to be one of the largest Native American collections in the world. The talks were initiated by the museum’s trustees, and discussions centered on an affiliation with the Smithsonian while still maintaining an independent museum in New York. Although not conclusive in themselves, these early talks led the way to future negotiations.

April 1987—Smithsonian Secretary Robert McC. Adams accompanied Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) to New York to talk with officials of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

May 4, 1987—The board of trustees of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation unanimously adopted a resolution providing for an affiliation between its museum and the Smithsonian and for the relocation of the museum collections to a new building on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

May 11, 1987—The Smithsonian Board of Regents approved a motion encouraging the Secretary to continue discussions with representatives of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, about the prospect of a formal institutional relationship between the museum and the Smithsonian.

Following discussions with the Smithsonian and the Heye Foundation’s board of trustees, Sen. Inouye introduced a bill (S. 1722) on Sept. 25, 1987 to establish a National Museum of the American Indian within the Smithsonian Institution.

The Smithsonian Institution continued its negotiations with the board of trustees of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. The Smithsonian Board of Regents approved an agreement in principle on Jan. 30, 1989 to transfer the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation collection to the Smithsonian.

March 16, 1989—Julie Johnson Kidd, chairman of the Heye Foundation, signed the agreement. The Smithsonian Board of Regents gave its final approval to the agreement on May 8, 1989 and Secretary Adams endorsed it the same day.

Sept. 12, 1989—Secretary Adams joined senators Inouye and Campbell for a press conference announcing the Smithsonian’s revised policy on repatriation of American Indian human remains in the National Museum of Natural History collections. The legislation establishing the new museum would incorporate the repatriation policy and appropriate funds for an inventory of human remains in the Smithsonian’s collections.

Nov. 28, 1989—President George Bush signed legislation establishing the National Museum of the American Indian as part of the Smithsonian Institution.

May 21, 1990—Secretary Adams announced the appointment of W. Richard West Jr. (Southern Cheyenne) as founding director of the new museum, effective June 1, 1990.

April 1991—The Smithsonian selected Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates Inc. of Philadelphia to assist the National Museum of the American Indian in developing general architectural program requirements and criteria for the design of the new museum in Washington, D.C., and for a Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Md., about six miles from Washington where the museum’s collections would be housed.

June 1992—The Smithsonian selected Polshek and Partners of New York City, Tobey + Davis of Reston, Va., and the Native American Design Collaborative to provide architectural and engineering services for the Cultural Resources Center.

Prior to the official opening of the George Gustav Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian, “Pathways of Tradition,” a preview exhibition that featured a selection of more than 100 objects representing American Indian cultures and creativity, ran from Nov. 15, 1992 - Jan. 24, 1993.


January 1998—The Smithsonian terminated its relationship with GBQC and Douglas Cardinal (Blackfoot) and the Institution assumed responsibility for the design and construction of the museum on the National Mall. Assisting the Smithsonian were Polshek/SmithGroup and
Johnpaul Jones (Cherokee/Choctaw).

**January 1999**—The National Museum of the American Indian opened its second facility, the Cultural Resources Center, a state-of-the art research and collections facility, located in Suitland, Md.

**Sept. 28, 1999**—The groundbreaking and blessing ceremony take place on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., at the site of the National Museum of the American Indian. Three planned inaugural exhibitions are planned to feature historic and contemporary aspects of Native life and highlight objects from the museum’s priceless collection.

**June 26, 2001**—The Smithsonian Institution awarded a contract to CLARK/TMR, A Joint Venture to build the National Museum of the American Indian. CLARK/TMR is composed of the Clark Construction Company of Bethesda, Md., and Table Mountain Rancheria Enterprises Inc., a construction company that is a subsidiary of the Table Mountain Rancheria of Friant, Calif.

**Sept. 14-15, 2002**—The museum sponsored a powwow on the National Mall adjacent to the museum construction site. Approximately 25,000 people attended to watch nearly 500 Native Americans dance throughout the two-day event.

**Nov. 20, 2002**—A “topping out” ceremony and blessing was held to mark the completion of the major structural elements of the new building.

**Sept. 21, 2004**—The National Museum of the American Indian’s third facility and flagship museum opened on Sept. 21, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., in front of the U.S. Capitol. The grand opening included a Native Nations Procession, Opening Ceremony and a six-day First Americans Festival. Opening day alone brought more than 80,000 people to the National Mall, which included Native Nations Procession participants.

For more information about the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, visit www.AmericanIndian.si.edu.