



ARCHIVES * RECORDS 2025: Making It Count

Inspire • Engage • Transform

Society of American Archivists

89th Annual Meeting & Expo

Herberger Institute
for Design and the Arts

ASU

**School of
Music, Dance
and Theatre**

**Arizona State
University**



Reviving Embodied Knowledge: Lessons from the Gertrude Kurath Collection at the Cross-Cultural Dance Resources Collections at Arizona State University

Shan Chuah



Land Acknowledgement

CCDR Collections at Arizona State University acknowledges that our institution's Tempe campus is situated on the ancestral lands of Indigenous people past, present, and future. We thank and honor the Native American tribes and sovereign nations of the Salt River Valley—including the Akimel O'odham, Onk Akimel O'odham, and Piipaash nations—whose knowledge and stewardship of the land and waterways allow us to be here now. In addition, we honor all 23 tribes in Arizona and their continued and many contributions today.

CCDR Collections History

From a Personal Collection to an Institutional Archive

Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts

ASU School of Music,
Dance and Theatre
Arizona State University

1981

Founding of CCDR in
Flagstaff, Arizona.

2000

National Recognition
as an 'American
Treasure'

2008

Transfer to Arizona
State University Begins

2015

New Curatorship and
Consolidation

2016

Completion of Transfer
to ASU

2024

New Leadership and
Expansion of Vision

Mission of CCCR

Promote holistic understanding and appreciation of the diversity and **significance of dance in cultural contexts**, through research, consultation, and public presentations that incorporate both humanities and arts

Provide a **“living museum”** where people may explore and discuss dance cultures in a welcoming atmosphere

Maintain a **library and archives** that support the mission

CCDR Collections at ASU

CCDR Special Collections
Library Catalog:

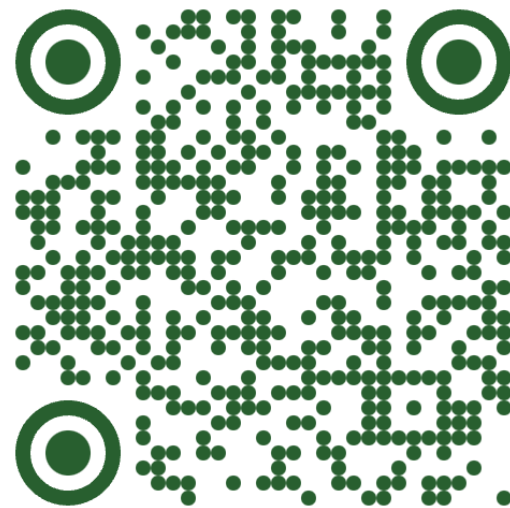
<https://hida.kohacatalog.com>

Digitized CCDR Collections
Media:

<https://ccdrcollections.omeka.net>



Scan here



Curatorial Framework

1. **Ethical Stewardship** – Engaging source communities in decisions.
2. **Embodied Access** – Supporting movement-based engagement with collections.
3. **Relational curation**—Recognizing that the archive's value lies in its relationships with communities, artists, and scholars.



Women who shaped a Living Dance Archive

Foundational Collections

Gertrude Kurath

Eleanor King

Joann Keali'inohomoku

Allegra Fuller Snyder

Elsie Ivancich Dunin



Gertrude Kurath Collection



Scan here for Kurath's
finding aid

Field of Research: Ethnomusicology and
Ethnochoreology

Contributions:

- Co-authored with Indigenous collaborators
- Combined ethnomusicology and dance analysis
- Founded Dance Research Center in Michigan

Legacy: Pioneer of Indigenous dance research;
interdisciplinarity in dance and music

Key Publication:

Kurath, G. P. (1960). Panorama of Dance Ethnology.
Current Anthropology, 1(3), 233–254.

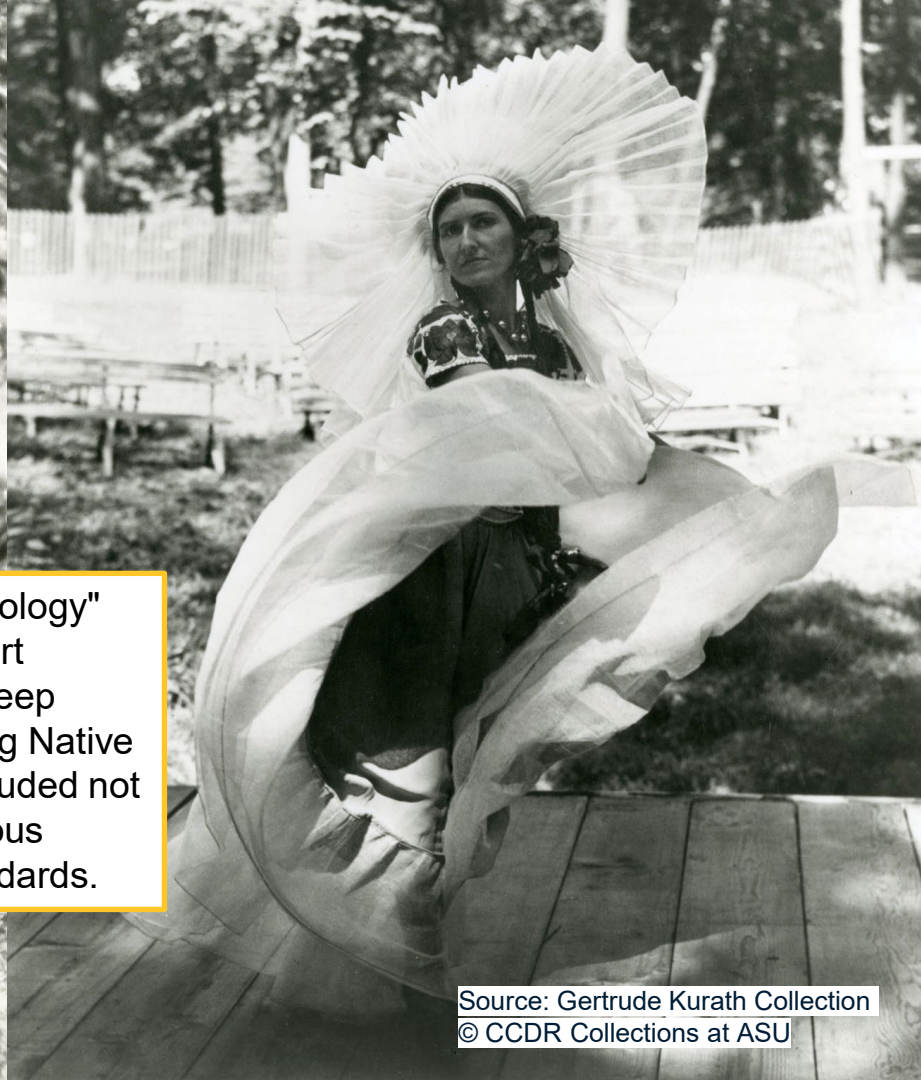


**Gertrude Kurath (1903-
1992)**



Gertrude Kurath, described as the "mother of dance ethnology" was trained as a dancer, choreographer, musician, and art historian. She was a pioneering scholar who combined deep musical expertise with dance research, particularly among Native American communities. Her fieldwork methodologies included not just notation and analysis, but collaboration with Indigenous informants decades ahead of today's research ethic standards.

Kurath Collection



Source: Gertrude Kurath Collection
© CCDR Collections at ASU

Ethical Stewardship

Rematriation of the Kurath Collection

In Fall 2024, CCCR welcomed Stephen Henhawk and Troy Richardson, both Indigenous scholars from Cornell University. Henhawk initiated a **rematriation process** in an act, described as “bringing the songs and dances home”.



“Gertrude was looking at us as if we were people. She wasn’t there just to research and extract from us...she took different care in her notes...way more care to be so precise”. Stephen Henhawk

Kurath Collection

An example of Kurath's musical and dance notation for Iroquois dances. Her notation, often improvised, struck a careful balance between precision and readability, making it accessible to non-dance specialists while remaining faithful to the movements she observed.

TUTELO RITUALS ON SIX NATIONS RESERVE, ONTARIO

Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, G.P.



Special Series Editor: Stephen A. Wild

The Society for Ethnomusicology, Inc.
Special Series No. 5

1981

Source: Gertrude Kurath Collection
© CCDD Collections at ASU

Iroquois Dances

J = 109

A a b' 3 B' i' du's

yo ne yo'one q de he go'ita

GR

J = 120 - 160

ye he-e he-e ho ni ne go ya

TR

J = 104

ni ye he a'a B' ga' a' a' ot

ha ye ha'a

J = 112 - 126

ga yo wani no -

J = 168

A B C two'oenq

ha yo ho

H R

cf C

14

1: A A B C B (D B) c B 1

Kurath Collection



Kurath's work exemplified long-term relationship-building. She spent years getting to know the community before even beginning formal research. Her photographs reflect a profound trust—she knew individuals by name and could describe their families in detail, including how many children they had.



35. Gertrude Kurath (left)
with Carrie Logan
Hill (right) and
3 of Carrie's 13
female children
(2 boys not in photo)

Six Nations Reserve

Source: Gertrude Kurath Collection
© CCDR Collections at ASU

Kathleen Victoria Eliza Hattie Veronica Betty Susan
Shagonaby Francis Kishigo Sagataw Kishigo Lou Shagon-
Seaman aby



Kurath Collection

Digitizing the Kurath collection requires special care, given its cultural sensitivity and the historical context in which it was created.

Embodied knowledge challenges the notion of archives as static and enables us to reimagine CCDR's mission as a "living" library, archive and museum.

Source: Gertrude Kurath Collection
© CCDR Collections at ASU



...The Place of Dance in Human Life

“Any dichotomy between ethnic dance and art dance dissolves if one regards dance ethnology, not as a description or reproduction of a particular kind of dance, but as **an approach toward**, and a **method of**, eliciting **the place of dance in human life** – in a word, as a branch of anthropology.”

Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, “Panorama of Dance Ethnology,”
Current Anthropology 1,3:233-254

Thank you! Questions?

E-mail: ccdrcollections@asu.edu

